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Flexible Fashion: A Precious Girdle Book at the Tudor Court

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Flexible Fashion: A Precious Girdle Book at the Tudor Court

by

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Dedication

To my family: Mom, Dad, Hannah, Nick, and the cats.

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Abstract

Flexible Fashion: A Precious Girdle Book at the Tudor Court

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This thesis attempts to construct an understanding of a sixteenth-century girdle book now held at the British Museum in London. With the exception of a few articles and catalog entries, primarily written by the British scholar Hugh Tait, the Tudor Girdle Book has received very little attention by art historians. It is one of a handful of examples of sixteenth-century precious girdle books, a unique decorative object used exclusively by European noblewomen during the Renaissance. Despite its relative obscurity, I argue that the Tudor Girdle Book offers insights into life at the Tudor court in the 1540s, particularly the role of women in the English Reformation. Furthermore, the replacement interior text, a set of prayers written by Elizabeth Tyrwhit and inserted in the 1570s, indicates a revival interest during the reign of Elizabeth I in the reformist women who surrounded Henry VIII's last queen, Katherine Parr. Using existing scholarship on the history of the book and women's fashion, along with portraits, inventories, letters, and other extant bindings, I examine how this girdle book, like a court lady, was designed to navigate the precarious experience of Henry's court. The Tudor Girdle Book was a fashionable item, but flexible enough to withstand the whims of the changing English state.

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Introduction

> Mary Magdalen, sitting at the feet of the Lord listening to his words, did not enjoy the contemplation of heavenly things only at that moment but while she was reading, listening, or praying. Not only should I wish my ideal young woman to do this, but any other woman, for in many passages in this book we give instructions to women in general. Therefore, she should read and pray when she is alone on feast days, and on ordinary working days as well, or be intent on manual work.[1]

Juan Luis Vives, a Spanish humanist working in the Netherlands during the first half of the sixteenth century, gave many instructions to the young Renaissance woman in his book *The Education of a Christian Woman*, but chief among them was his recommendation that she read. His book was translated into English for the first time in 1529[2] and quickly became among the most popular books of conduct for Tudor women.[3] Vives's instructions repeatedly appeal to the need to keep women from idleness, with reading books among the preferred methods of distraction.[4] Finding the right books, however, was crucial. For a Tudor woman, married or unmarried, prayer books and holy texts were the primary reading material.[5]

It is easy to imagine, then, that Vives would have generally approved of the owner of the Tudor Girdle Book, now in the British Museum [Fig. 1], dating from the 1540s.[6] Vives's text and works like it teaching the proper conduct for young women illustrate how vital books were, not just as a way to spend the days or as part of a general program of education, but for the

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[1] Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 63.

[2] Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., "Introduction," in Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), lxxiv.

[3] King and Rabil Jr., lxii. The Latin edition of 1523 was dedicated to Catherine of Aragon and meant to educate her daughter, Princess Mary, as well as the general population.

[4] Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, 29.

[5] Vives, 28–29.

[6] Hugh Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett': An Important Class of Renaissance Jewellery at the Court of Henry VIII," *Jewellery Studies* 2 (1985): 29–57. I will discuss the dating of the Tudor Girdle Book in Chapter Three. There is strong evidence that it was created no earlier than 1539 and was complete by the end of the 1540s.

edification of a woman's soul and the control of her body. The text inside would ideally guide the female reader in her thoughts and physically prevent her body from engaging in baser activities.[7] A girdle book is the model tool for achieving this ideal of womanhood. These small books, attached by a chain to a woman's girdle belt, provided immediate portable access to an appropriate focus for a woman's hands and thoughts. The contents were typically religious in nature, such as prayers or portions of the Bible. Due to their small size—typically only a few centimeters tall and wide and not much bigger than a woman's hands—the texts were often short. Psalms and prayers were the most commonly inserted texts, as they were ideal for repetitive reading and religious meditation.

Just like Vives's intended instruction to high-born Tudor women on the benefits of reading the right texts, the girdle book is emblematic of the changing attitudes towards girls' and women's education in the sixteenth century. Henry VIII (r. 1509–1547) sought to build a court that rivaled those in France and Spain, and this included an emphasis on humanist education. Both of his daughters, Mary (b. 1516, r. 1553–1558) and Elizabeth (b. 1533, r. 1558–1603), were better educated than the English princesses of preceding generations.[8] After England's break from Rome in the 1530s, educated women were continually at the center of the English court. Henry's second wife, Anne Boleyn (r. 1533–1536), bought reformist texts as queen.[9] Henry's last queen, Katherine Parr (r. 1543–1547), was not only the first English queen to publish under her own name, but also invited controversial Protestant thinkers into her inner circle.[10] Women were "burning to read" and, in the case of some religious extremists, they were burned for

[7] Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, 43. Vives advises his readers to find an occupation for female hands in order to prevent them from gambling, for example.
[8] Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England 1500–1700* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 42.
[9] Paul F. M. Zahl, *Five Women of the English Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 18–19.
[10] Susan E. James, *Kateryn Parr: The Making of a Queen* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 3–4.

reading.[11] With the popularity of the book on the rise, it is unsurprising that the fashion of wearing decorated girdle books arose at the Tudor court. With these objects, women could simultaneously indulge a desire to engage with favorite texts and could parade their alignment with sixteenth-century expectations of "good" women.

The rise and fall of the precious, or decorated, girdle book as a fashion item largely mirrors that of the Tudor dynasty. The books remained popular throughout the Tudor period, but fell out of fashion by the early seventeenth century.[12] The Tudor line reached a new stability with Henry VIII, which allowed for his foreign marriage to Catherine of Aragon (r. 1509–1533) and the import of foreign fashions, like the girdle book and a style of dress that made large girdle decoration possible.[13] The accession of Henry VIII was an unusually smooth transition for England. His father, Henry VII (r. 1485–1509), came to the throne by force when he defeated King Richard III (r. 1483–1485) at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. Richard had claimed the throne by political force after having his nephew Edward V declared illegitimate.[14] It is no wonder then that both Richard III and Henry VII chose English brides as a way to unite factions within the English borders that had been warring for the second half of the fifteenth century.[15] By the early sixteenth century, the Tudor line was assured by two healthy Tudor boys in Arthur and the future Henry VIII. This stability allowed Henry VII to look abroad for his son's wife. Although Arthur's marriage to Catherine of Aragon was short-lived due to his untimely death

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[11] James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). The title of this book is apt phrasing for the situation during England's Reformation. Even after Henry's reforms, Anne Askew, a friend of Queen Katherine Parr, was burned for her beliefs and many more were burned during the reign of Henry's daughter Mary I.

[12] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 49.

[13] I will discuss this in depth in the first chapter.

[14] David Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses* (New York: I.B Tauris, 2013), 116.

[15] Grummitt, 105 and 127. Richard III married Anne Neville in order to secure her inheritance, and Henry VII obtained support for his claim to the throne by marrying Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, symbolically uniting the two warring houses.

just six months after the wedding, the political alliance was maintained when she married Arthur's brother, Henry. Catherine is credited with introducing many Spanish fashions to the English court and was possibly the vector for the precious girdle book. The English taste for continental fashion was also spurred on by Henry's competition with the courts in Spain and France. Henry desperately sought to establish himself on equal footing with his rivals—a jealousy splendidly encapsulated in the Field of the Cloth of Gold, a meeting between Henry and Francis I of France in 1520,[16] renowned for the mutual display of conspicuous wealth in each king's attempt to outdo the other. Henry's desire to match the other rulers of Europe extended beyond the frivolous to a generally supportive and modern attitude towards women's education, particularly that of his daughters', thus creating a Renaissance court in England in appearance and values. Girdle books from the first half of the sixteenth century, while on the surface a fashion moment, were also an outgrowth of the increasingly continental looking Tudor court and represented changing Renaissance tastes in jewelry, religious practice, and women's education.

What I have discussed thus far is the briefest outline of the context in which the British Museum's girdle book came to be. While this thesis is primarily concerned with this individual book, since very little can be ascertained about this specific object, I will also look at other precious girdle books and depictions of girdle books in order to make a case for this book as an emblem of a Protestant Tudor woman of the 1540s. The Tudor Girdle Book and others like it have largely been treated as jewelry objects in previous studies,[17] while their social function and contexts have been ignored or under-explored. For the remainder of this introduction, I will

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[16] Paul Matthews, "Apparel, Status, Fashion. Woman's Clothing and Jewellery," in *Women of Distinction: Margaret of York & Margaret of Austria*, ed. Dagmar Eichberger (Leuven: Brepols, 2005), 150.

[17] In addition to several books and articles by Tait (see discussion on page 10), it was featured in jewelry exhibitions in 1997 (Germany, Pforzheim, Schmuckmuseum Pforzheim, *Idol and Ideal-Human Imagery in Jewellery of the 16th Century*) and 1991 (London, National Maritime Museum, *Henry VIII at Greenwich*) according to the British Museum's website.

outline what is known about The Tudor Girdle Book, including how it has been addressed in recent literature, and the structure I will use to expand on our current knowledge.

The gold and enamel book binding is assumed to originate from the early 1540s based on the inscriptions, from either the First Great Bible (1539) or the Cranmer Bible (1540), that accompany the images on both sides.[18] While the binding is intact, the contents are a later addition, likely added around 1574.[19] The book has been definitely linked to several owners in the mid-nineteenth century, before its acquisition by the British Museum in 1894, but the original owner remains unknown.[20] It is referenced in earlier collections as well. According to the British Museum website:

> [The] earliest reference to this book [is] in 1788, [by] John Nichols, [in] *The Progresses, and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, where it is said that this book was given by Tirwit to Elizabeth I on her confinement in the Tower, as recorded in a now lost note in the front of the book. When he wrote this the book belonged to Rev. Mr Ashby of Barrow, Suffolk, who could trace it back in his family to 1603. The Ashby family retained it until 1791 when William Herbert, book collector, described it in *The Gentleman's Magazine*. It was auctioned from the Duke of Sussex's library in 1843.[21]

Although this list of owners only extends back to 1603, the binding almost certainly dates from the latter part of Henry VIII's reign. In addition to the inscriptions taken from either the 1539 or 1540 English translations of the Bible, it has strong stylistic similarities to the two Speke book panels from a dismantled girdle book [Figs. 2 and 3], dated to between 1510 and 1525.[22] I will return to these panels multiple times in later chapters as their visual parallels and nearly identical

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[18] Hugh Tait, "Girdle Prayer Book (Entry 11)," in *Princely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1630*, ed. Janet Arnold et al. (London: Debrett's Peerage in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1980), 49.

[19] British Museum, "The Tudor Girdle Book," British Museum Website, 2019, https://www.britishmuseum.org.

[20] British Museum.

[21] British Museum.

[22] British Museum, "Plaque Book-Cover," British Museum Website, 2019, https://www.britishmuseum.org. These two separate panels are also in the British Museum's collection and were likely owned by the Speke family in the sixteenth century.

size to the Tudor Girdle Book suggest either the same artist or workshop or, alternatively, that the patron, artist, or both were acquainted with the earlier binding. All of this strongly points to the Tudor Girdle Book's creation in the early 1540s.

From a material perspective, it is easy to understand why this object has been treated first and foremost as a piece of jewelry. Its diminutive size, just 6.5 by 5.6 centimeters per panel, and the addition of gold loops for attaching it to the body by a girdle chain recall pendants and decorative lockets rather than reading material. The covers are made primarily of gold with designs created in a combination of gold relief and colored enamel. From extant lists of sixteenth-century inventories, we know that small, decorated girdle books were inventoried among jewelry collections by their owners due to their precious materials, while books bound with cloth or leather were inventoried separately.[23] In the first chapter of this thesis, I will address how, as a jewelry object, the girdle book is intrinsically linked to the development and changes in women's fashion through the reigns of Henry and his children. While its place in jewelry history is undeniable, the hitherto emphasis of the jewel-like qualities of this binding has limited the scope of research on this object.

Treating the Tudor Girdle Book merely as a piece of jewelry ignores its relationship to other media circulating at the time, including paintings, prints, and literature. For example, the images on the front and back covers (Moses and the Brazen Serpent [Fig. 4] and the Judgment of Solomon [Fig. 5], respectively) were repeated motifs in Protestant and Henrician art in the sixteenth century. I will discuss the implications of these scenes more thoroughly in the second chapter of this thesis. The accompanying inscriptions on the Tudor Girdle Book, taken from the earliest royally sanctioned English translations of the Bible, situate this binding at the heart of the

[23] David Starkey, ed., *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, vol. 1 (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 77.

formation of English Protestantism. Furthermore, the interior contents, although added at least several decades later, are a reminder that this object is not just emblematic of religious changes in England but also of the change in women's participation in religious debate, an aspect I will discuss in chapter three.

The interior text, *Morning and evening Pariers with divers Psalmes, himnes and Meditations,* was written by Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit (or Tirwit) and printed in 1574 for the first time in London by Henrie Middleton for Christopher Barker.[24] Given the date of printing and that pages were removed to reduce the thickness, it is evident that this text is not original to the binding; it is, however, still a fascinating and telling part of the book's early history. In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I will discuss the book's relationship to women's scholarship during England's Reformation. Tyrwhit was a lady-in-waiting to several of Henry's queens, including the Protestant Katherine Parr.[25] Literacy in general skyrocketed during this period, for men as well as women,[26] and it was a century marked by multiple well-educated female monarchs. The insertion of the text by Tyrwhit appears to be a deliberate recalling of the Tudor court under Katherine Parr.

My approach to the girdle book, as fashion object, art object, and text gives a more complete picture of how this book binding, and other precious girdle books, functioned in sixteenth-century England. In order to construct this narrative, I rely on three main types of primary source evidence. First, the surviving girdle books in museum collections around the world. In England, the British Museum owns two girdle books including this one and the Speke book panels, and the British Library owns the John Croke girdle book [Figs. 6 and 7] from about

[24] British Museum, "The Tudor Girdle Book."
[25] Susan M. Felch, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 3–4.
[26] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England,* 35.

1540.[27] Additional examples are found in collections in the United States and the rest of Europe. The actual objects, however, only provide a limited amount of information about their construction, stylistic trends, and contents. Very few can be traced to their original owners, and only a handful of completely intact decorated girdle books survive, likely due to their fragility and the repurposing of their precious materials.

In order to profile the average owner of these books, Tudor inventories, wills, and even letters can fill in the gaps. Inventories indicate that some households owned more than one girdle book and detail the variety of materials used to decorate them. Wills and inventories record girdle books in household collections, as well. Unfortunately, wills written by women are very rare. A study on early English wills from 1327 to 1485 by Kristen M. Burkholder reports that about 16.5% of wills belonged to women.[28] Of those, 90.1% were the wills of widows (otherwise their property was kept by their husbands).[29] Inventories of Henry VIII's household and those of his queens provide promising evidence of multiple girdle books in the collection of a single owner; however, these inventories are of the highest echelon of court members and do not confirm the frequency of girdle book ownership among lower nobility. Tudor documents are notoriously inconsistent in spelling and naming conventions for these objects. It is probable that I have overlooked some examples due to these issues. Letters, too, suggest a court context for these books. Hugh Tait uncovered a 1538 letter from Anne Basset, then a Maid of Honor to Queen Jane Seymour (r. 1536–1537), to her mother Lady Lisle requesting a girdle book to wear

[27] Hugh Tait, "Goldsmiths and Their Work at the Court of Henry VIII," in *Henry VIII: A European Court in England*, ed. David Starkey (New York: Cross River Press, 1991), 112.
[28] Kristin M. Burkholder, "Threads Bared: Dress and Textiles in Late Medieval English Wills," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker, vol. 1 (Woodbridge, England: Boydell Press, 2005), 135. Burkholder's data was taken from the Court of Husting and Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
[29] Burkholder, "Threads Bared," 137.

while in service to the queen.[30]

A final visual source for the sixteenth-century girdle book is portraiture. Many bindings are reproduced in portraits and drawings. Generally, full length Tudor portraits were rare before the 1530s,[31] subsequently a girdle book hanging down the length of a woman's dress would not have been included. Exceptions include some half-length portraits where the owner holds her book up by its girdle chain, a type I will discuss more fully in chapter one. Representations of girdle books, although limited in that they show only one side of the binding, offer much needed context for these books including how they were worn, handled, and in what settings.

Scholarship on all precious girdle books, including those in the British Museum, is limited. Margit Smith's recent book *The Medieval Girdle Book* specifically leaves out these types of treasure bindings, as her study is focused on the larger, leather bound "medieval girdle books" popular among the clergy. Physically, these books are entirely different from the types of bindings I will discuss here. They are leather bound and rarely use precious materials. The leather medieval girdle book, however, also frequently appears in late Medieval art and literature leading to some confusion between the two types of bindings. St. James wears one in a panel by Hieronymus Bosch as do several mourners on the tombs of the dukes of Burgundy.[32] The leather covering often extends past the binding to create straps that could be tied around a belt or girdle, hence the similar nomenclature. Smith claims there are 26 extant examples of these types of book.[33] Her study builds on catalogs started by Ursula Bruckner, a librarian at the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, and by Paul Adam, a nineteenth-century historian.[34] While I will

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30 Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 29.
31 Jane Malcolm-Davies and Ninya Mikhaila, *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing 16th-Century Dress* (Hollywood: Costume and Fashion Press, 2008), 7.
32 Margit J. Smith, *The Medieval Girdle Book* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2017), 25.
33 Smith, 18.
34 Smith, 16–17.

discuss these types of books in relation to the development of the precious girdle book used by aristocratic women, they are ultimately a different class of binding.

I frequently reference the work of Janet Arnold, a twentieth-century British costume historian, although she never wrote on girdle books specifically. I will argue that the popularity of the girdle book coincides with changes in women's dress, and her detailed studies of the movements in English fashion in the sixteenth century are invaluable. Arnold is frequently cited and credited by other costume historians for her comprehensive look at British Renaissance fashion.[35]

Hugh Tait has done the most work on this particular girdle book and the others in British collections. He discusses the Tudor Girdle Book in several catalogues, including *Jewellery Through 7000 Years*, *Seven Thousand Years of Jewellery*, and P*rincely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1630*. All three of these entries include findings Tait published in full in a 1985 *Jewellery Studies* article "The Girdle-Prayerbook or Tablett: an important class of Renaissance Jewellery at the court of Henry VIII." He examines both the British Museum's Tudor girdle book and the Speke book panels, as well as two girdle book designs by Hans Holbein [Figs. 8 and 9]. To my knowledge, this is the only attempt at a comprehensive look at precious girdle books in England. In this article, Tait first proposed that the artist responsible for the binding of the Tudor Girdle Book was Hans (also known as John) of Antwerp, a friend of Hans Holbein the Younger and goldsmith working in London in the 1540s.[36] Although I find reason to question this attribution, it is currently accepted by the British Museum. Tait's findings are frequently cited in other studies of Renaissance jewelry, including Tara Hamling's *Decorating the 'Godly' Household* and Yvonne Hackenbroch's *Renaissance Jewellery*. While

[35] Malcolm-Davies and Mikhaila, *The Tudor Tailor*, 8.
[36] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 39.

neither of these authors provide substantial information on this specific book beyond the work done by Tait, they do discuss the book alongside other related decorative objects of the same time period.

Although Tait's career centered on the metalwork cover, the British Museum has also preserved the girdle book's interior text. Susan Felch edited a volume on Elizabeth Tyrwhit's *Morning and Evening Prayers,* which not only includes a transcription of the text inside the Tudor Girdle Book, but also a biography of Elizabeth Tyrwhit and her connections to various players at the Tudor court from Henry VIII's reign through that of Elizabeth I. Tyrwhit's life spanned a large part of the sixteenth century and closely followed the most important figures in English political happenings of the time. Despite her text's late inclusion in this girdle book, Lady Tyrwhit's life and writings help complete the picture of this book's function and how, by the 1570s, there was already a revival interest in the reformist women of the English Reformation. I concede that I am making an assumption that Tyrwhit's writings were inserted in the 1570s and not at a later date; however, I base this assumption on several pieces of evidence. First, the note in *The Progresses, and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I* mentions that the book was in the Ashby family from the year of Elizabeth's death (1603) onwards. At a minimum, the existence of the note suggests that Tyrwhit's text was in the binding by 1788, as Tyrwhit's relationship to Elizabeth is the apparent basis for the legend. As there is no mention of removing an alternative text, despite being in the possession of a single family from 1603 to 1788, I conclude that the Tyrwhit text was inserted prior to the Tudor Girdle Book coming into the Ashby family's possession. Second, Elizabeth's reign would have been an ideal time to revive an object associated with the early English Protestant women of the 1540s. Tyrwhit's text is based on the kinds of writings produced by educated Protestant women, like Katherine Parr

and Anne Askew, with whom she was friendly. The combination of visual and textual references to the 1540s in the Tudor Girdle Book paired with the Tyrwhit text would have been an effective statement of support for Elizabeth I's restoration of Protestantism in England, a point I will argue in the final chapter of this thesis. These factors point to the text's insertion into the Tudor Girdle Book sometime between 1574, when it was printed, and 1603, when it was transferred to the Ashby family.

Ultimately, I argue that this girdle book is a statement about its female owner's character to such an extent that we can almost know her without knowing who she was. The images on the exterior panels represent the self-image she wished to present at court or to a potentially wider audience in a portrait. The interior contents, like a locket or a diary, could be kept locked behind metal clasps. In this way, the contents are as guarded as her private thoughts. They could even be changed and adapted to suit her needs as her religious views evolved over time, just as this book's contents were changed in the 1570s. The scenes on the cover would appeal to both religious conservatives or reformers and allowed the girdle book to survive multiple changes in religious law, a flexibility mastered by many courtiers. As an emblem of the self it is full of contradictions; it is simultaneously pious and frivolous. The images and the pages are religious, but the materials are far from humble. The dual meanings are epitomized by the duality of the book itself, with its public and private uses. The girdle book in the British Museum's collection can thus be interpreted as a metaphor for a Tudor lady; a miniature version of the public and the private self. By wearing, she demonstrated her understanding of court fashion and declared both her religious piety and devotion to the state; but in the end the true nature of her religious affiliation remained contained inside. In this context, the Tudor Girdle Book suggests not just that women's religious scholarship was accepted, but fashionable.

Chapter 1: Girdle Books and Fashion at the Tudor Court

The precious girdle book was first and foremost a fashion item. Although a girdle book contained small texts, its consistently diminutive size means it was an impractical object to use and could only hold a limited number of pages. I will not completely dismiss the importance of the text contained in the Tudor Girdle Book, which I will return to in the final chapter; however, this primary function as body adornment deserves proper scrutiny. Labeling it as such does not diminish the historical value; on the contrary, it offers insight into an exchange of ideas between England and the continent, and it is intimately tied to the lives of the many women who surrounded Henry VIII.

Fashion trends were a method of communication for all genders, but for women in particular, for whom the body was a commodity and often a symbol of contracts between men, the careful placement of the right stones, colors, and cloth had important implications. The sister of Henry VIII, Mary Rose Tudor, was originally betrothed to Charles V, heir to the Spanish throne and Duke of Burgundy and as a result, between 1507 and 1514, she wore Burgundian fashion at Henry's court. In 1514 when Henry's alliance with the Burgundian Netherlands ended, he betrothed Mary Rose to Louis XII, and she adopted French clothes.[37] Even before any marriage had taken place, Mary was a visual symbol of the promised alliance between Henry and her future spouse. Clothing marked a woman's transitions through life, with specific garments indicating social rank and whether a woman was a virgin, wife, or widow.[38] Women could even strategically use fashion to make statements that would have been inappropriate to express explicitly. In June 1520, while attending the jousts at the famed Field of the Cloth of Gold, Queen Catherine of Aragon was said to have worn a Spanish headdress as a protest against

[37] Matthews, "Apparel, Status, Fashion," 147.
[38] Matthews, 147.

England's alliance with France against Spain.[39]

The jewelry a woman wore had specific meanings. Very generally, a well adorned woman testified to the "glory" of her family.[40] A woman's dowry "often consisted in large part of jewelry," which could be sold.[41] The exchange of portraits was a common component of marriage contracts, and while a woman's potential husband might have been primarily interested in understanding her physical likeness from these images, her accessories suggested aspects of her character, as well as the material wealth she could bring to the marriage. Her pearls might signal both her fertility, recalling their creation inside an oyster's shell, and also her purity with their white color.[42] The symbolic nature of jewels was highlighted by Henry VIII in a letter to Charles V, in which Henry wrote that the emerald he was sending Charles represented hope.[43]

While the meanings of individual stones and materials have histories and understood meanings stretching back many centuries,[44] fashion could often have a momentary significance, as evidenced by Mary Rose Tudor's and Catherine of Aragon's references to specific alliances with their dress. This utilitarian aspect of fashion, aside from its aesthetic properties, is a possible answer to why the girdle book fell out of fashion almost within a century. The circumstances of the sixteenth century, particularly the religious turmoil in England and abroad, created the perfect environment for this object. The relative stability in England by the end of Elizabeth's reign rendered the girdle book démodé.

In this chapter, I will begin with a short prehistory of girdle books as well as a consideration as to why so few survive to the modern day. Several examples—including

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[39] Matthews, 150.
[40] Matthews, 148.
[41] Matthews, 149.
[42] Matthews, 149.
[43] Matthews, 149.
[44] For example, Albertus Magnus wrote a treaty, *De mineralibus*, discussing the properties of stones.

disassembled girdle books, repurposed book parts, designs for books that no longer exist, as well as a few intact books—begin to build a picture of their brief ubiquity. Additionally, I will discuss royal inventories, letters, and other documents, which demonstrate that a number of girdle books existed at Henry's court even if the physical bindings have not survived.

The history of the precious girdle book begins outside of England. There are several examples of girdle books from other European countries, including Italy and Germany. These examples point to the general popularity of these objects, but also their origins outside the English Protestant milieu. It has been suggested that the girdle book arrived in England with Catherine of Aragon.[45] I will take this one step farther and suggest that Catherine did not just introduce the decorated girdle book, she introduced the more supportive farthingale skirts, which allowed women to wear girdle books in the first place. This change in dress is documented in portraits of women, another method of asserting the frequency of the girdle book in England. These portraits confirm that the girdle book was a common adornment, and they suggest reasons why women chose them as opposed to other common girdle chain objects and in what contexts the books might have been worn.

With reference to existing girdle books, descriptions of these objects in various texts, and girdle books reproduced in paintings, I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the physical qualities of existing English precious girdle books, including the construction of the books, the non-figurative imagery often found on the bindings, and how they were handled. I will compare the Tudor Girdle Book with a number of related objects, such as book-shaped jewelry and false girdle "books" containing no text. This related group of objects suggests the broad appeal of the book as a symbol, with the book in jewel form serving as a kind of badge

[45] Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain, 1066–1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary and Artistic Survey* (Wilby, Norwich: Michael Russell, 1994), 138.

indicating the wearer's engagement with religious activities fit for a sixteenth-century woman.

PRECURSORS: THE LEATHER MEDIEVAL GIRDLE BOOK AND BOOKS OF HOURS

The Tudor Girdle Book and bindings like it did not materialize independently; instead they appear to be a development combining medieval girdle decoration, a long tradition of small books of hours used by elite women, and the leather medieval girdle book long used by clergy members and learned men. While books of hours have been studied extensively, the precious girdle book and the medieval leather girdle book have similarly sparse bodies of literature. These precursors provide some context for the precious girdle book but do not demonstrate a direct development of the book as a jewel.

Small books of hours are among the clearest forerunners for these bindings. They were also often owned and used by women, fulfilled a similar function of facilitating daily religious meditation, and were relatively small in order to comfortably fit in the reader's lap or hands. Women's book ownership was not uncommon, even if their collections were relatively small. Susan Goag Bell's article "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture" gives a preliminary accounting of women's book ownership between 800 and 1500. She documents 242 known female book owners in that 700-year period, with the majority in the 14th and 15th centuries.[46] She gives many reasons for the rise in domestic (and female) readership: from the practical to the economic. The availability of eyeglasses in the thirteenth century and the introduction of the chimney flue and fireplace in many homes in the fourteenth century, along with glass windows, made indoor reading comfortable.[47] Bell further argues that women were drawn to reading because they were taught "to model themselves on

[46] Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture," *Signs* 7, no. 4 (1982): 745.
[47] Bell, 746.

biblical heroines."[48] Reading facilitated the adoption of proper behavior and provided a window for religious engagement despite a consistently male-dominated hierarchy in the Catholic Church.[49] Since European noblewomen owned texts with increasing regularity in the 14th and 15th centuries, the precious girdle book might have been a natural outgrowth of the newfound accessibility of the book. Not only did wealthy women own more books, but the books themselves were cheaper, particularly with the invention of the moveable type printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. Owning a text was no longer the sole purview of the ultra-rich, but lavishly decorated books or books as decorative objects, in the case of the girdle book, added an air of exclusivity.

Decorated books have been common for centuries, although early examples of decorated book covers are most common for liturgical texts owned by the Church. David Ganz argues that manuscripts used by the clergy were decorated in order to "augment the sacredness of these already sacred objects."[50] Similar logic might be applied to sacred texts owned in the home. Beyond the pleasure of owning a beautiful book and the status it implied, the decorated prayer book provided the owner with a tangible spiritual value.

In addition to physical similarities, the way books were handled demonstrates their fluidity between practical and decorative object. An illumination showing Mary of Burgundy reading her prayer book [Fig. 10] illustrates the ways certain books were treated like something precious and jewel-like; the book is covered in cloth so that her hands did not meet the binding, as a gesture of respect for their religious contents. Moreover, since they were handled and held,

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[48] Bell, 752.
[49] Bell, 752.
[50] David Ganz, "The Cross on the Book: Diagram, Ornament, Materiality," in *Graphic Devices and the Early Decorated Book*, ed. Michelle P. Brown, Ildar H. Garipzanov, and Benjamin C. Tilghman (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2017), 264.

even without a girdle chain, they acted as an extension of the body. Miniature books to an even greater extent blended with the body as they might not even extend past the palms or fingertips and needed to be held close to the face to be read (they could not be read at lap level like a larger text). Held in this way, miniature books forced the body to close in on itself. Although men were also known to own small decorated prayer books,[51] this body position was an ideal for a woman of the time, whose body was already physically and legally subservient to the men in her life. While reading a miniature prayer book, a Renaissance woman embodied this control. The reader was made physically smaller in order to hold such a small book. Furthermore, she had to cast her eyes downward and focus intensely on the small print in order to read the text. The nature of reading these kinds of books was distinctly more private and intimate than a large tome spread out on a table, which would allow the reader to likewise inhabit a large space. The addition of a girdle chain to her miniature book only heightened the metaphor. The precious girdle book reader physically enacted a meek and introspective form of piety expected of the Renaissance woman.

Books of hours and decorated personal prayer books prefigure the precious girdle book in terms of decoration, ownership, and content; the medieval leather girdle book [Fig. 11] is another related type of binding. In her 2017 book, Margit Smith expanded the number of known leather medieval girdle books to 26 examples.[52] Margit Smith provides a concise definition of both types of girdle books and describes the leather medieval girdle book as follows:

> The girdle book has a cover that extends usually from the bottom edge of the boards beyond the limits of the book itself and may end in a knot, hook or ring, or may be left ungathered. By this extension the book hangs with its head down, but when swung up to be read without detaching it from the belt, the writing faces in the correct direction. The

[51] One example of this is a lusciously decorated book of hours that belonged to Francis I of France and is owned by a private collector in Britain.
[52] Smith, *The Medieval Girdle Book*, 18.

> knot, hook, or ring could be slipped under the belt to hold it securely, or if the extension leather was left ungathered, it could be slipped under the belt and folded over. In cases of primary and secondary coverings, the extension was always a part of the secondary covering. The girdle book was most often a utilitarian book and was not primarily produced, intended, or used as an ornamental accessory.[53]

These books are known by a number of names, including "*Beutelbuch, Buchbeutel, reliure à queue, sac à livre, étui à livre, libro da cintura,* or *reliure à l'aumônière, libro de bolsa, libri caudati.*"[54] Like the precious girdle book, few leather medieval girdle books survive. Smith's 26 examples make this the longest known list. She states that the primary purposes of these bindings were functional and practical concerns: the attachment prevented theft, made them portable, protected the contents, and allowed the user easy access during the day.[55] Their contents were more varied than the precious girdle book variety. While they both often contained religious texts, the leather girdle books could also hold medical, legal, or philosophical writings as well.[56] They were also used by both men and women, although possibly most commonly by clergy members and monastics.

Despite the lack of surviving examples, paintings frequently reproduced such leather girdle books in the hands and on the belts of nuns, monks, and saints. For example, a panel painting from around 1500, *Saint Catherine of Siena Besieged by Demons* [Fig. 12], shows Saint Catherine wearing a leather girdle book on her belt as a symbol of her piety, both of which allowed her to resist her tormentors.[57] Karl Kup claims there are over 150 examples of leather girdle books in paintings and sculpture but that they were only worn by clergy or those connected with the Church.[58] Furthermore, he points to a 1548 woodcut as the last image of a

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[53] Smith, 2.
[54] Smith, 1.
[55] Smith, 4.
[56] Smith, 8 and 275.
[57] This is also the cover image for Margit Smith's book.
[58] Karl Kup, *A Fifteenth-Century Girdle-Book* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1939), 3.

leather girdle book and a mark of their decline in popularity by the sixteenth century.[59] Although historians looking at the leather medieval girdle book have traditionally excluded the precious girdle book from study, Smith did provide a useful definition of the precious girdle book, which demonstrates its key differences from the leather examples:

> Small jewel-like, often gold- or silver-cased objects, embellished with precious stones, with portraits, short devotions or miscellaneous notes, even small locks of hair or other mementos … mainly for royalty, the nobility and extremely wealthy citizens, they can be more accurately classified as pieces of jewelry or miniature books than girdle books, exemplified by the small book with a portrait of Henry VIII. In his article Walter Blumenthal suggests the much more appropriate term 'pendant binding' for these treasure bindings as they resemble pendants usually associated with necklaces, but hanging from a low-slung belt.[60]

While I agree with Smith that the precious girdle book is a distinct class of binding, with a separate structure and purpose than the leather medieval kind, I disagree with the suggested term "pendant binding." The precious girdle book may resemble a jewelry pendent, but it is still a book containing text. As I will discuss at the end of this chapter, there are also examples of "false" girdle books that fit the term "pendant binding" more closely, for they contain no text and only mimic the look of a precious girdle book.

The precious girdle book appears to be a blending of the private book of hours favored by the upper classes and the utilitarian, portable leather medieval girdle book. A final key difference between these forerunners and the precious girdle book is readability. Precious girdle books are so small that it seems unlikely that they were primarily intended to be consulted or for the transmission of the information they contained. It is probable that they facilitated a meditative ritual of reading instead. They were held like a book and provided the comfort of keeping the hands busy; however, given the limited amount of text they contained it is easy to imagine that

[59] Kup, 3.
[60] Smith, *The Medieval Girdle Book*, 7.

the words could be memorized after repeated use. In this sense, they become a kind of comfort object, providing a focus for one's spiritual meditation. This is further supported by visual evidence of their use. While I will explore multiple possible contexts in which these books could be worn, several portraits and drawings of girdle book imply that they were often worn in times of mourning.

Despite the links between the precious girdle book and earlier forms of bindings, there is no clear beginning for these books as fashion objects. Few examples survive and it is difficult to declare with any certainty when the earliest girdle books were made. A possible candidate for the earliest precious girdle book is a German example now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon [Figs. 13 and 14]. The museum claims that the book dates to the fifteenth century. This date, however, is based mostly on the small illuminated devotional text inside the binding, which is made up of four small books sewn together. The pages include illuminations of the birth of the Virgin, the Nativity, the Annunciation, Saint John in a landscape, and the Last Judgment. Additional pages include floral and animal decoration. The text begins with a genealogy of Christ and continues into several prayers in German. The binding itself is decorated on both the interior and exterior. The interior is made up of two metal plates with engraved images of the Virgin and Child in Glory and the Lamentation with similarities to engravings by Albrecht Dürer and Martin Schongauer.[61] The exterior plates are covered by cloth into which several relics are sewn, however, the labels on the relics are worn and too difficult to read or identify; it is also decorated with small pearls and metal wire. The panels are connected with a spine on one side and a single metal clasp on the other. The defining feature making this example a girdle book, as

[61] Le Bien Public, "Un Livre d'heures Miniature, Objet de Dévotion Privée," Le Bien Public: Dijon aux Beaux-Arts, August 23, 2013, https://www.bienpublic.com/grand-dijon/2013/08/23/un-livre-d-heures-miniature-objet-de-devotion-privee.

opposed to a miniature book, is the pair of hooks on the top and bottom of the binding, which would allow this book to be fixed to the owner's girdle chain. The dating of the book is uncertain. Due to specific references to German territories of the fifteenth century, the text is thought to be from that time, but some of the decoration on the exterior of the binding may have been added in the seventeenth century.[62] As a result, it is not possible to confirm that the girdle loops are fifteenth century.

While I have found no other girdle book with ties to the fifteenth century, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection includes a French decorative case for a small prayer book [Fig. 15] from the first half that century.[63] The book and text it once contained are now missing, but it includes a tasseled rope attached to the exterior of the case for portability. This is not a girdle book, as there is no indication this was intended to be attached to a girdle, nor is it the binding for a book, but the rope implies that it was intended to be carried. The case is highly decorated with ivory inlays mimicking cathedral rose windows, which would create a similar effect to a decorated binding. Despite these fifteenth century forerunners, the confirmed examples of girdle books, which I will discuss in the remainder of this chapter, all date from the sixteenth century, beginning around the 1510s, a strong suggestion that the precious girdle book began around this time.

TUDOR DRESS SUPPORTING THE GIRDLE BOOK

An additional clue that the fashion of wearing precious girdle books began in the early 1500s is the documented change in women's dress with the introduction of the farthingale skirt, which created a support system for more elaborate and heavier girdle decoration. Medieval

[62] Le Bien Public.
[63] Metropolitan Museum of Art, "French Manuscript Case," Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2019, https://www.metmuseum.org/.

women in England and the rest of Europe did wear girdle chains, but these chains were less common than in the sixteenth century. When they were worn, they appear to have been considerably shorter and designed to hold lighter objects, like small pomanders or rosary beads, or no object at all. By the end of the fifteenth century, Spanish women began wearing farthingale skirts, which provided additional support and structure to a woman's gown, the shape and structure of which I will describe in greater detail below. This fashion was likely introduced to England by Catherine of Aragon and from there spread to France.[64] This skirt provided a platform for heavier and more elaborate girdle decoration, which evolved rapidly throughout the rest of the century as the farthingale changed form.

Establishing a timeline of girdle fashion is hindered by a number of factors. Based on drawings, paintings, and illuminations depicting women's dress, it is apparent that many girdle "chains" were made of cloth or ribbon and have not survived to the present day. Many of the metal girdle chains in collections are undated and cannot be relied upon to establish a change in the fashion, which was in all likelihood was not linear anyway. Consequently, images of women in full dress offer a more fruitful source of information. These images pose their own difficulties. For example, many early English portraits are half-length, leaving the girdle and any attachments a mystery if they are not held up for the viewer to see. Illuminations and funeral effigies are more likely to show the body at full length. Both indicate that fifteenth-century women wore girdle chains, but they were not a mandatory part of women's dress. Furthermore, they were thinner, shorter, and held smaller objects than their sixteenth-century counterparts. An illuminated book of poetry owned by Edward IV (d. 1483) [Fig. 16] includes several images of women in court dress with belted waists, but no girdle chains, indicating this was not a required

64 Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd: The Inventories of the Wardrobe of Robes Prepared in July 1600* (Leeds: Maney, 1988), 123.

fashion item at the time. These belts appear to be cloth, although there are examples with metal decoration attached. The French fashions of the fifteenth century appear to have been roughly similar, as exemplified in an image of Christine de Pizan giving her book to Queen Isabel of Bavaria [Fig. 17]. Some girdles did appear to extend past the waist. The tomb effigy of Elizabeth of York [Fig. 18] from the beginning of the 1500s includes a cord girdle that extends almost to her feet. Another example is in a book of hours belonging to the Neville family, dating to around 1425–30, showing Joan of Beaufort and her daughters [Fig. 19]. The second daughter from the left in the first row appears to wear a cloth girdle belt, however, it trails behind her instead of hanging from the front. Medieval girdles were also made of metal links, as was common in the sixteenth century. The marriage scene of Henry V and Catherine of Valois [Fig. 20] in the *Chronicles of France* from 1487 depicts this kind of chain. The linked girdle chain only reaches to about the knee and is secured loosely around Catherine's waist. A commonality in these images is the loose-fitting dress of the women. The dresses were one piece—something that would change in the sixteenth century—and as a result, the waist was poorly articulated. This construction provided poor support for heavy girdles and attachments. The loose style of dress would cause heavier belts and chains to fall between the legs and any attachment would strike them while walking. Not only would this make walking more difficult and uncomfortable, but it could potentially damage any precious objects attached to the chain. The realities of fifteenth-century dress in England, combined with the lack of surviving examples of girdle books, suggests that they did not become fashionable until the sixteenth century when skirt fashions changed.

A possible catalyst for this change in style was the introduction of the farthingale skirt to England from Spain by Catherine of Aragon and her Spanish ladies. As queen and the female

figurehead of the country, it is understandable that her taste influenced English court fashion. The Spanish farthingale, a kind of hoop skirt also known as a Verdingale, was developed in Spain sometime in the latter half of the fifteenth century.[65] Evidence of the early farthingale in Spain includes a painting of Salome by Pedro García de Benabarre from the *Saint John Retable* [Fig. 21] in Catalonia, dated to around 1470. Both the figure of Salome and the women immediately behind her wear contemporary Spanish court dress, including a bell-shaped skirt with visible hoops sewn into the fabric. The hoops achieved this stiff bell or cone shape, although the hoops were later covered by additional skirts and did not remain visible for more than a few decades. This type of Spanish farthingale, with hidden hoops, is apparent in both a full-length portrait of Queen Katherine Parr [Fig. 22] and an early portrait of Elizabeth I as queen [Fig. 23].

Queen Catherine of Aragon arrived in England for her marriage to Prince Arthur in 1501.[66] Fashions were often transmitted from region to region through these types of political marriages, as women would bring clothing and jewelry with them when they married as part of their dowries.[67] Weddings were even an occasion for goldsmiths, jewelry makers, and garment makers to develop new pieces in order to show off their skills, as they would be on display to a wide audience.[68] Catherine's marriage in England would have been an opportunity for the Spanish monarchy, and the artisans who outfitted her trousseau, to show off the glory of Spain. While some have suggested that Catherine brought the fashion of wearing girdle books with her from her home country,[69] I have found no direct evidence to support this. It may be that no early

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65 Janet Arnold, *A Handbook of Costume* (New York: S. G. Phillips, 1980), 159.
66 Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*, 123.
67 Yvonne Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979), xii.
68 Hackenbroch, xii.
69 Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 138. Scarisbrick is among those who suggests that the girdle book was a Spanish fashion introduced by Catherine of Aragon, because it appeared in the early part of her reign.

Spanish books existed and that she only brought the farthingale skirt, which lead to the development of the girdle book as an accessory first in England.

The farthingale skirt took three distinct forms during the sixteenth century, but each provided a structure for more elaborate girdle and girdle jewelry decoration impossible with prior dress types. The Spanish farthingale was popular into the mid-1500s, but it was completely out of fashion by the 1590s.[70] The next phase, the French farthingale, was popular from the 1580s into the first two decades of the seventeenth century.[71] Unlike the cone or bell shape of the Spanish version, this skirt had a steep drop off where the structure ended underneath the wearer's skirt. An example of this type of dress is Elizabeth I's Armada Portrait of 1588 [Fig. 24]. The final sixteenth-century iteration of this skirting is the wheel or great farthingale,[72] which is essentially an enlargement of the French version and is evident in Elizabeth's Ditchley Portrait from 1592 [Fig. 25]. Each successive version increases the circumference of the skirt, moving the hem far beyond the wearer's feet. This would allow a girdle chain to hang down the front of the skirt and main relatively undisturbed by the wearer's movements while she walked. In the case of the Spanish farthingale, which included hoops down the entirety of the skirt from the waist to the floor, it would also create a stiff surface on which items of jewelry could rest even if they hung low. For the later French and great farthingale, the support ended where the structure dropped off, several inches past the waist. Possibly because of this, paintings like the Ditchley Portrait show shorter girdle chains and ropes. In the Ditchley image, Elizabeth's fan hangs from her waist by a girdle rope that has been tied in a knot. Although she holds the fan in her right hand, one can estimate that when dropped it would, understandably, not extend past the knees,

[70] Arnold, *A Handbook of Costume*, 149.
[71] Arnold, 159.
[72] Arnold, 161.

since the French farthingale would not provide support for a long girdle chain with heavy objects attached.

From the early 1500s until the end of Elizabeth's reign, girdle chains were almost always worn.[73] The chains fell into three categories: "a long narrow sash or cord, knotted in front, or occasionally passed through and held by ornamental rings, and ending in long hanging ends, usually tasseled, … a decorative belt, fastened in front by [a] buckle or clasp often in a trefoil arrangement, and generally continued with one long hanging end tipped with an ornamental tag, … [and a] narrow jewelled chain with one long pendant end in front."[74] Occasionally the front part of the girdle chain was made of metal and the half that ran around the wearer's back would be made of cloth, often silk.[75] Items suspended from these chains, in addition to girdle books, included rosaries, purses, fur stoles, pomanders containing scented herbs, and, in rare cases, daggers.[76] Spanish girdle chain objects tended to be particularly religious in nature.[77] In addition to rosary beads, decorations included amulets, objects containing relics,[78] and religious symbols, for example a hand clutching the nails of the passion.[79] The girdle chain was not just a practical tool for holding favorite objects, it was often intimately tied to a woman's devotional practices. In addition to carrying objects of religious significance like relics and prayer books, girdles were often donated to churches. The donation was often intended to hang on the statue of a favorite saint. For example, Dame Joan Chamberlain of York donated her wedding ring and gold girdle

[73] Arnold, 64.
[74] Arnold, 66.
[75] Arnold, 66.
[76] Arnold, 85.
[77] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 309.
[78] Hackenbroch, 317.
[79] Hackenbroch, 317.

in 1502 to an image of Saint Anne.[80] Girdles were frequently donated to images of Mary in reference to an apocryphal story in which St. Thomas doubted the assumption of Mary, so she threw down her girdle to him from heaven.[81]

Among girdle decoration, the girdle book was only worn by a small class of noblewomen. Expense alone put it out of the reach of many, although one might imagine that cheaper, less decorated versions might have made it into the hands of middle-class women; this does not appear to have been the case. Drawings of middle-class fashion indicate that these women did not wear girdle chains as in Lucas de Heere's Drawing of Four Citizens' Wives from *Corte Beschryuinghe van Engheland, Schotland, ende Irland* c. 1574 [Fig. 26].[82] This demonstrates how strongly the precious girdle book fell into the category of jewelry object. Despite the practical functions I have mentioned, it was most visible as a decoration on a noblewoman's attire. Besides middle- and lower-class women, men were also excluded from the girdle book fashion. Although men did wear decorated girdle chains and belts, which often held purses or other small objects,[83] they do not appear to have been as elaborate or as long as those for women. Furthermore, the objects found at a man's waist—a purse or sword—were representative of his active place in the world. The objects on woman's girdle—a fan, jeweled pomander, or prayer book—were all suggestive of her passive role. Since it was worn on the body for all to see, the decorated girdle book, in addition to its practical use as a spiritual aid, was primarily a signal to others of a noblewoman's status, her wealth, and her piety.

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[80] Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50–51.
[81] Peters, 51.
[82] Tarnya Cooper, *Citizen Portrait: Portrait Painting and the Urban Elite of Tudor and Jacobean England and Wales* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 77.
[83] Arnold, *A Handbook of Costume*, 146.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF THE GIRDLE BOOK

Among the evidence that only noblewomen used and wore girdle books are such documents as inventories and letters that mention these objects. While the information is sparse, at times not even describing the physical characteristics of the book, these documents tell us what the surviving books cannot: the names of people who owned them. Such records also indicate the variety of materials and forms girdle books could take. Finally, the way the books are categorized in these documents indicates that they were primarily considered jewelry or accessory objects rather than functional books.

After Henry VIII died in January 1547, an inventory of his possessions was taken, the most complete record ever made of Henry's household goods.[84] The inventory includes not just Henry's possessions, but items belonging to the crown for the use of his queen.[85] One example, Item 2652, is described as "a booke golde enameled black garnysshed on eche side with fyve dyamountes and other small rubies and on eche Claspe a dyamounte."[86] There is no specific indication that this example was a girdle book, since it does not mention a chain or hooks, but it was clearly a lavishly decorated book binding. It was probably an item owned by Henry's queens and probably not for Henry's personal use, as it appears in a list of "The Quenes Jewelles in a Cofer Hauing Written Vpon It The Quenes Jewelles" and among items described as "tablet[s]," which may refer to girdle books or tablet images that were hung from women's girdle chains. The text inside item 2652 is not mentioned, because it was not the primary information that needed to be documented; what was important was the value of the material. The makers of Henry's inventory categorized these decorated books as a jewelry object due to the binding,

[84] Starkey, *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, 1997, 1:ix.
[85] Starkey, 1:77.
[86] Starkey, 1:78.

regardless of the text. Books with more typical bindings were recorded elsewhere in the inventory. Items 234–37 are also "booke[s]." For these examples, the contents are specifically mentioned, which include parts of the Gospels.[87] These books are not listed among jewelry items, but instead with images of the saints, indicating that this is a list of devotional aids not decorative items. One can speculate that these were not seen as decorative objects in the same way as item 2652.

Other items listed with the queen's jewels might be girdle books or jewels worn in similar ways. For example, Item 2657 is "a Tablet being a whistell of golde A woman the vpper parte golde enameled white and the lower parte of mother of perle and one faire rubie and a lesse Rubbie a large dyamounte and twoo other meane dyamountes thone poynted and iij verie small cheynees of gold to hang it bye."[88] It is unclear if his item contained a text, but clearly it was meant to hang from a girdle chain. According to another inventory, Catherine Willoughby, an English noblewoman and lady-in-waiting to Katherine Parr, owned "a boke covered in velvett to hang at her girdell," which was listed in the 1550 inventory of her household.[89] Her book does not appear to have contained precious stones and was thus a simpler design, demonstrating further variety among girdle books as well as their use by women other than the queen.

A final documentary example is a letter from Anne Basset to her mother Lady Lisle, dated March 15, 1538. Hugh Tait discusses Basset's use of the term "tablet" in this letter to describe what he has determined was possibly a girdle book. He reproduced the following excerpt in *Jewellery Studies*:

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[87] Starkey, 1:16.
[88] Starkey, 1:78.
[89] Arnold, *A Handbook of Costume*, 185. See the sixteenth century Willoughby Household Accounts in *Report on the MSS. Of Lord Middleton.* Hist. MSS. Commission No. 69 (1911)

> I have received of Hyw Philkocckes all things your ladyship sent me, saving my jaseran [another problematic name for an item of jewellery] the which I beseech your ladyship to send me with the first, and also a frontlet, for James had the frontlets of black velvet your ladyship sent me and said your ladyship would send me another with the first. And if your ladyship would be so good lady unto me as to send me an edge of pearl and a tablett to wear, I were much bounden unto your ladyship, for I have never a tablett to wear.[90]

Tait acknowledges that "tablett" or tablet is a problematic term, as it can refer to double-sided images as well. However, both tablets and girdle books were of a similar size and worn in a similar way, hung from a woman's girdle chain. The way Anne writes to her mother is informative. Anne's letter is almost pleading. As a girl only recently accepted into the service of Queen Jane Seymour and desperate to fit in at court, her tone demonstrates the necessity of tablet and girdle book accessories and other fashionable items in order to succeed.[91] The issue of Anne's tablet resurfaced in a letter on April 6 of that same year from John House to Anne's mother, Lady Lisle:

> Mrs Anne hath humbly commended unto your ladyship and desireth your blessing, thanking your ladyship for her girdle and pearls which she hath received. But vj score are not enow, nor indeed they are not to be worn in the Queen's service unless they might be set full. I have put a tablett to making for Mrs. Anne.[92]

Apparently, Lady Lisle had sent her daughter the requested girdle and pearls, but not a tablet, which she instead paid to have made in London.[93] Tait points out that Lady Lisle did own at least four tablets, according to a 1540 inventory, which were likely made of gold. He concludes that Lady Lisle probably intended to wear them herself and had a new one made for her daughter.[94] It appears that girdle books and tablet decorations for girdles were not only popular among the queen's unmarried ladies, but also for married women living far away from court.

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[90] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 29.
[91] Tait, 29.
[92] Tait, 29.
[93] Tait, 29.
[94] Tait, 30.

BOOKS AS JEWELS

The girdle book's relationship to jewels extends beyond precious materials and inventories. Girdle books share many stylistic similarities with other decorations. Based on surviving examples and representations of these books in portraits, they were typically between the size of the human palm or full hand, not unlike tablet images, large lockets, and portrait miniatures. Like these accessories, girdle books clasped shut. While this is a practical necessity to keep these objects from swinging open and becoming damaged while hanging from the waist, the clasps further imply that these objects had both public and private uses. The images or decoration on the cover of the book or exterior of a tablet locket were for public consumption. The interior contents could be kept private for the owner or shared with a close friend or companion and only in close settings due to the girdle chain. The exteriors of girdle books range from aesthetically pleasing designs to intensely personal images or words, like family initials or mottos.[95] The line between girdle books and jewelry decoration is further blurred by "false" girdle book pendants. These pendants were purposefully fashioned to look like small books, but instead contained no text. The interiors were either additional images or space for precious items, like relics. One example of a false girdle book is owned by The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland [Fig. 27]. It is a relatively late example from around 1600 and like the Tudor Girdle Book, it has an image on the back cover of Moses and the Brazen Serpent; the front cover is the Agony in the Garden. Although it mimics the look of a book, down to the raised cords on the spine, when opened there is no text; instead one finds additional images: one of the Lamb of God with the three nails of the Crucifixion and another of St. Joseph of Arimathea.[96]

[95] Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 135.
[96] Walters Art Museum, "Pendant in the Shape of a Book," Walters Art Museum: Works of Art, accessed April 8, 2019, https://art.thewalters.org/.

It has been suggested that the portrait miniature gradually replaced the girdle book and similar pendants in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.[97] By the mid-1580s, portrait miniatures of Queen Elizabeth worn as jewels were the height of fashion; scholars argue that the fashion originated as a Protestant replacement for the wearing of sacred objects popular among Catholics.[98] Since they were similarly worn on the body—although in this case by both men and women—this seems a natural change in court fashion dictated by monarchical preference.

GIRDLE BOOKS IN PORTRAITS

Before I discuss the few remaining Tudor-era girdle books, I will turn to a number of portraits that depict girdle books with their owners. The appearance of these subjects in portraits far exceed the remaining English examples of girdle books and provide four key types of information about how they were worn. First, portraits appear to confirm that they were worn exclusively with farthingale skirts, whether in the Spanish, French, or Great farthingale style. Second, they show a number of different girdle chains of varying lengths and in some cases how women held their books. Third, for portraits where the sitter is identified we can put a name to a girdle book owner. Finally, several images confirm the use of girdle books at funerals and during times of mourning.

Portraits have several limitations. As previously mentioned, there are few full-length Tudor-era portraits of women. Portraits to the knee of the sitter are also rare, with a few exceptions. Until the 1530s, portraits of women were generally from the waist up.[99] The girdle chain often extended beyond the picture plane and the girdle book may not be well represented in portraiture as a result. Additionally, only women who could afford to sit for portrait are

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[97] Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 134.
[98] Roy C. Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 121.
[99] Malcolm-Davies and Mikhaila, *The Tudor Tailor*, 7.

documented in this way. If there were examples of lower-tier girdle books owned and worn by women of a more modest class, they are unlikely to have been documented in portraits. A final problem is dating the portraits. Many of the paintings are undated and we can only make an informed guess as to their date based on the apparent age of the sitter, if she is known, or on stylistic qualities. I have found no firmly dated early portrait of an English woman with a girdle book that would indicate these objects were favored before the time of Catherine of Aragon. This may be for the reasons I have listed, or it may support my theory that it was the introduction of the farthingale skirt that allowed the girdle book to develop in England.

There are many portraits of English noblewomen with books, large and small, but in order to classify them specifically as girdle books there needs to be a visible loop for the girdle chain. A group portrait of the family and descendants of Sir Thomas More in the National Portrait Gallery in London [Fig. 28] includes a book in the hand of almost every sitter, male and female. The painting by Rowland Lockley was created in 1593 after a now lost painting by Hans Holbein the Younger.[100] Several of the books in the laps of the kneeling women are far too large to be girdle books, but two figures hold small prayer books. One is Maria, wife of Thomas More II, the grandson of Sir Thomas More. The other is Anne More, wife of John More, Sir Thomas More's son, who is represented in a painted portrait behind the other sitters in the painting. Their laps are obscured and it is difficult to tell if they wear girdle chains and, if so, whether these prayer books are attached to them. However, given the subjects, it is unlikely that these prayer books were meant to represent girdle books. Thomas More hired tutors to teach both his sons and daughters and gave instructions to treat them equally in their education as he believed education

[100] National Portrait Gallery, "Sir Thomas More, His Father, His Household and His Descendants," National Portrait Gallery, London, accessed April 8, 2019, https://www.npg.org.uk/.

was a spiritual practice and was therefore appropriate for women, too.[101] The books in the More family portrait, rather than representing specific texts owned by the individuals portrayed, probably symbolize the egalitarian education More gave his children. There is a similar type of book—red and bound in what appears to be leather—in a 1595 portrait of Esther Inglis [Fig. 29] by an unknown artist. It is a half-length portrait; her arms, bent at the elbow with hands clasped at her waist, prevent the viewer from seeing if she wears a girdle chain or if the book in her hands is attached. Since Inglis was a calligrapher and miniaturist, [102] the book is likely representative of her career. These first examples, although not representations of girdle books, demonstrate the frequency with which books were included in portraits of women in the sixteenth century, often with a direct relationship to those women's biographies. In portraits where the sitter's book is clearly a girdle book, the book is primarily symbolic, likely of her piety due to the frequency of religious cover images and texts inside these types of bindings.

There are a number of portraits in which it is plainly evident that the sitter holds or wears a girdle book. Two portraits by Hans Eworth depict noblewomen with their girdle books. One is a portrait of an unknown lady, possibly of the Wentworth family, dating between 1565 and 1568 [Fig. 30]. [103] A second is an unconfirmed portrait of Lady Anne Pennruddocke at age 20, painted in 1557 [Fig. 31].[104] In both portraits, the girdle books prominently hang from a girdle chain silhouetted against the red fabric of the woman's dress and about half way between her waist and the ground. The symmetrical cone shape of her skirt implies a Spanish farthingale, which leaves the front surface of her gown flat for displaying the black and gold book. The thickness of the

[101] Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 157.
[102] National Portrait Gallery of Scotland, "Esther Inglis, 1571–1624: Calligrapher and Miniaturist," National Galleries of Scotland, accessed April 8, 2019, https://www.nationalgalleries.org/.
[103] Malcolm-Davies and Mikhaila, *The Tudor Tailor*, 13.
[104] Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*, 134.

spine suggests it is a book, rather than a pendant. Lady Penruddocke and the previously mentioned Anne Basset, are examples of young women with their girdle books, but these objects appear to have been popular with all ages. Another portrait of a noblewoman and her girdle book, the portrait of Lady Anne Petre, states that she is 58.[105] Although her portrait is cut off just before her knees, she pulls the girdle book into the frame by its chain.

A final example, a 1592 portrait of Lady Philippa Speke [Fig. 32],[106] speaks to the longevity of girdle books within families. In the portrait, Speke is richly dressed in a wide, possibly French farthingale skirt. She wears a large lace collar with matching lace cuffs, her black gown is adorned with gold decoration, and around her neck she has heavy gold chains, all highly fashionable dress items from the 1580s and 90s. She does not wear a girdle chain, but instead a red cord is threaded through her bodice at the end of which is a gold girdle book with an image of Susanna and the Elders before Daniel. Hugh Tait points out that this is a fairly uncommon scene, which, in addition to stylistic similarities, connects this portrait with a pair of gold book cover panels in the British Museum's collection [Figs. 2 and 3]. The panels are from much earlier, about 1510–1525, and include a second scene of the Judgment of Solomon. In addition to the shared subject in the Judgement of Solomon, the Speke book panels are noticeably similar to the Tudor Girdle Book of 1540. They are of almost identical size, both are made of enamel and gold, and both have identifying inscriptions creating frames for the images. The Speke book panels and the Speke portrait 80 years later demonstrate that these treasured objects were passed on in families for several generations. Tait points out that Philippa Speke's husband Sir George Speke was descended from Sir Thomas Speke (1508–51), who was a

[105] Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 147.
[106] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 50. She is identified by her married coat-of-arms in the upper right corner of the picture.

powerful member of Henry's court at the time the panels were made. He was also close to Viscount Lisle, Anne Basset's stepfather. George seems to have inherited all of his father's property including the jewels of his mother and stepmother. Tait concludes that the book was likely a treasured possession of George Speke, having previously belonged to his mother, Lady Anne Speke, which was the reason George's wife Philippa wears it in the 1592 portrait, despite such objects being generally out of fashion by this time.[107] Through her accessories, Lady Philippa Speke's portrait refers to her relationships, familial and otherwise. She wears other items of sentimental value, including bracelets with the gold initials "ER" for "Elizabetha Regina." Lady Speke received several gifts from Elizabeth; these bracelets may have been among them.[108]

Most of these portraits with girdle books demonstrate that these objects were popular among a specific class of noblewomen, many of them active at Henry's court, however, an additional group of images point to a funerary context. A drawing in the British Library and brass rubbing from a memorial in Buckinghamshire are prime examples of this context for girdle books. The brass rubbing is from a 1557 memorial to Jane Seynet Johns[109] and the drawing is of a mourner at the 1578 funeral procession for Lady Lumley [Fig. 33]. From these types of images, it appears that the girdle book was not only used at court, as suggested by Anne Basset's epistolary plea to her mother, but also during times of mourning. A double portrait from 1560, *The Judde Memorial* [Fig. 34], furthers this idea, but in this case with a more general association with the inevitability of death, rather than a specific individual's passing. The portrait of William and Joan Judde is a *memento mori* image from sometime soon after the couple's marriage.[110]

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[107] Tait, 50–51.
[108] Tait, "Girdle Prayer Book (Entry 11)," 106.
[109] James Laver, *Early Tudor, 1485–1558*, Costume of the Western World 3 (London: Harrap, 1951), 21. Plate 52.
[110] Cooper, *Citizen Portrait*, 109.

Husband and wife each place a hand on a skull in the center of the picture, which sits on an inscribed box reminding the viewer that the couple will be resurrected after death. Joan Judde holds a small girdle book up by its chain with her left hand. The book is remarkably similar in design to the books in both Hans Eworth portraits [Figs. 30 and 31] and a design by Hans Holbein [Fig. 9]. Specifically, it is black with either silver or gold foliate designs, which may have been among the most popular decorative schemes. The inclusion of the girdle book, along with many other religious symbols, in *The Judde Memorial* suggests that the book was a general reference to Joan Judde's piety and the basis for her belief in resurrection after death. Nevertheless, the references to death and resurrection in the portrait group it with the other instances of girdle books in funerary and memorial contexts. These books represent a spiritual comfort most needed at times of loss or at the contemplation of one's own eventual death.

REMAINING EXAMPLES OF PRECIOUS GIRDLE BOOKS

The idea that these books provided comfort is further supported by several legends attached to surviving girdle books, including the Tudor Girdle Book, the John Croke girdle book, and the girdle book with the prayers of Edward VI [Fig. 35]. The Tudor Girdle book was allegedly given to Elizabeth I while she was confined in the Tower of London during the reign of Mary I.[111] The John Croke girdle book, a rare example of an intact girdle book, was said to belong to Anne Boleyn. The legend states that Anne gave the girdle book, which also contains a small miniature of Henry VIII, to one of her ladies-in-waiting while on the scaffold.[112] A third

[111] Tait, "Girdle Prayer Book (Entry 11)," 49.

[112] According to the British Library website: "The volume corresponds with one described in George Wyat, Extracts from the Life of Queen Anne Boleigne … written at the close of the XVIth century, and now first printed [in London in 1817].…Wyat notes that it was traditionally said to have been given by Anne Boleyn, when on the scaffold, to one of her maids of honour, a lady of the family of Wyat." C. Wight, "Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts: Stowe 956," The British Library, accessed April 8, 2019, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/.

example decorated with a shell cameo of the head of a warrior on the cover, contains prayers said by Edward VI (b. 1537, r. 1547-1553) on his deathbed and was possibly later given to Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, by Elizabeth I.[113] All three legends are unsupported by contemporaneous documentary evidence and are likely fabrications in order to increase the value of the books. However, they all refer to periods of mortal terror for three of England's monarchs. The credibility of these stories relies on their contexts being appropriate settings for girdle books. Thus, the girdle book, in addition to court decoration and private spiritual aid, was a common comfort object to sixteenth-century women during moments of crisis.

In addition to the English examples, there are surviving intact and partially intact girdle books, originating from elsewhere in Europe in the sixteenth century. The Walter's museum owns a small girdle book from Italy decorated with rubies and containing a set of penitential psalms [Fig. 36].[114] Since no intact English examples include precious stones, this binding demonstrates the variety of girdle book cover decoration. The relative lack of examples is explained by the dismantling of precious girdle books for their materials, a treatment that was common among precious book bindings of all shapes and sizes. According to the inventory of Charles V, Blanche of Savoy's fourteenth-century prayer book originally had a jewel encrusted cover.[115] Another example, a pax with the arms of Elector Daniel Brendel von Homburg, Archbishop of Mainz, which is now in the Schatzkammer der Residenz in Munich, was repurposed from the front of a prayer book.[116] In addition to repurposing bindings for other

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[113] Victoria and Albert Museum, "Prayer Book," Victoria and Albert Collections, 2017, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/. There is no indication that Henry Carey would have worn this gift himself; more likely, it would have been worn by his wife or other female members of his household, if at all.
[114] Walters Art Museum, "Miniature Manuscript Used as a Pendant," Walters Art Museum: Works of Art, accessed April 8, 2019, https://art.thewalters.org/.
[115] Alexa Kristen Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 241.
[116] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 139.

objects, precious stones were easy to remove and sell for cash, and the precious metals in the bindings could be melted down for additional funds.

Many girdle books were likely dismantled when they fell out of fashion. The sixteenth-century precious girdle book, much like the leather medieval girdle book, easily transitioned into a traditional book binding. Margit Smith proposes that there may be many unknown examples of medieval girdle books in leather where either the cover was replaced or cut down in order to store them vertically.[117] Precious girdle books with gold and silver bindings would be even easier to transition and remove the evidence of the change. Once the loops were taken off the metal could be smoothed to remove any trace of the book's former function. In cases like the Speke book panels, girdle book bindings were altered, not to create a traditional book, but to preserve the fine images. The Speke panels no longer have the girdle chain loops shown in Philippa Speke's portrait, so they were not used as pendants but could still function as individual devotional images. Girdle books were also highly susceptible to damage. Unlike a traditional prayer book, which was stored while not in use, the girdle book remained on the body and as portraits with girdle books show, they had the potential to swing on the girdle chain and strike other objects while in motion. Portraits of women holding their girdle books by their chains are a fair representation of how a woman might need to protect her book while wearing it; however, it is still probable that many girdle books were dismantled after becoming damaged through use.

CONCLUSION

The Tudor Girdle Book in the British Museum's collection, on its own, does not provide extensive evidence regarding its use and the circumstances of its creation. The owner of the book is unknown and even the date of its creation and the artist who made it are in question, as I will

[117] Smith, *The Medieval Girdle Book*, 7.

discuss in the next chapter. Outside examples including other surviving girdle books, images of girdle books in portraits, written references to girdle books in inventories and letters, as well as predecessors to the precious girdle book in the book of hours and the leather medieval girdle book build a more complete picture of how and when the Tudor Girdle Book was worn. The original owner was almost certainly a woman of noble birth attending Henry VIII's court. She likely wore her book on a long chain, reaching almost to the ground, over a Spanish or French farthingale skirt. The Tudor Girdle Book was among her finest possessions and would have been an appropriate adornment for court life or if she sat for a portrait. Her book would have also been a jewel to wear in times of distress or while mourning the death of a loved one as a symbol of her piety, her faith in the concept of resurrection after death, and as a spiritual comfort. The religious imagery on the front and back covers further supports the idea that this book was a devotional tool for its owner, the topic I will turn to next.

Chapter 2: Serpents and Solomon as Reformation Images on the Tudor Girdle Book

The British Museum's Tudor Girdle Book [Fig. 1] is unique among surviving examples for its figurative images and because it is mostly intact, missing only its original text. The Tudor Girdle Book is also a fine example for study, because it can be closely dated to around 1540 and was in use at least until 1574 when the current interior text was printed; its useful life spans the height of the precious girdle book's popularity. In this chapter, I will examine the physical qualities of the Tudor Girdle Book in more depth, including how it is constructed and how it compares with similar designs, and I will conclude with the debate over who created it. The front and back covers, made of gold with enamel details, depict the Old Testament scenes of Moses and the Brazen Serpent [Fig. 4] and the Judgment of Solomon [Fig. 5], respectively. As others have mentioned, these images were "iconographical themes dear to the reformers" in England.[118] John King even goes as far as to suggest that the owner was a lady who had married into the royal family, like Anne Seymour, Queen Jane's sister-in-law and aunt to Edward VI, or Mary Fitzroy, wife of Henry VIII's illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy.[119] However, there is no documentation to support any specific owner or any owner that closely tied to the royal family. Nevertheless, the images do point to a Protestant lady living at court, who was intimately connected with other English reformers. The person who commissioned this binding was keenly aware of emerging trends in Protestant images first developed abroad in places like Germany, trends that reached England by the 1530s.

The images are accompanied by inscriptions, which identify the scenes; these texts are taken directly from early English translations of the Bible. The scene of the Brazen Serpent is framed

[118] John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 83.
[119] King, 83–85.

by the inscription: “MAKE. THE. AFYRE. SERPENT. AN. SETITVP. FORA. SYNE: THATAS. MANY. ASARE. BYTTE. MAYELOKE. VPONIT. AN. LYVE.” The image of Solomon is similarly surrounded by a biblical inscription: “THEN. THE. KYNG. ANSVERED. AN. SAYD. GYVE. HER. THE. LYVING. CHILD. AN. SLAYETNOT. FOR. SHEIS. THEMOT. HER. THEROE. 3K3C.” Both versions appear in the First Great Bible published in 1539 and the Cranmer Bible of 1540. Slight changes in later editions confirm that the text is taken from one of these two sources.[120] This spelling confirms the binding was created no earlier than 1539 and probably no later than 1553 when Mary I ascended the throne, as the reform images and inscriptions would have been less fitting for her court than for that of her father. Both Moses and Solomon were often employed as references to Henry VIII, as they were considered “Henry’s precursors as religious reformers.”[121] The images might not have been considered heretical by Catholics,[122] but in England they are more strongly associated with the Protestant rules of Henry and Elizabeth, as I will discuss in more depth later in this chapter.

THE CONDITION OF THE TUDOR GIRDLE BOOK

The Tudor Girdle Book is made up of three separate hinged pieces: the front and back covers and the spine. The covers can be held together by two gold clasps, which would prevent the book from swinging open while worn on a girdle chain. Two suspension loops, one on the top of each cover, would secure the entire book to the chain. Given that the suspension loops are only at the top of the covers, the book was probably hung down the length of a woman’s gown as seen in the two portraits by Hans Eworth [Figs. 30 and 31]. This appears to be the most common placement

[120] Tait, “The Girdle-Prayerbook or ‘Tablett,’” 45.
[121] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 85.
[122] King, 85. Catholics also used images of Moses and Solomon as symbols of wise and just rule, for example by Charles V and Mary I’s husband, Philip II of Spain.

of suspension loops, although one example, the book in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon [Fig. 13], has suspension loops on the top and bottom, suggesting it could have been tied to a girdle chain on one side and elsewhere on the body by the second loop, as seen with a girdle jewel in the Hardwick Hall portrait of Elizabeth I [Fig. 37]. The decorated spine of the Tudor Girdle Book mimics the look of a large, traditional book, including faux raised chords. In addition to the decorative images, this girdle book is covered with moresque designs and the materials are incredibly luxurious. The book is made almost entirely of gold, but details like the spine, clasps, and loops are decorated with colored enamel. Yvonne Hackenbroch compares the black enamel moresque decoration on the spine and clasps to the *Moryse and Damashin* by Thomas Geminus, a book of jewelry designs published in 1548; she suggests a slightly later date of 1549 for the Tudor Girdle Book as a result.[123] Since many of these designs published in books for jewelers and goldsmiths were borrowed from other sources, including Islamic art,[124] these similarities do not necessarily mean the binding was created after the 1548 publication of Thomas Geminus's book. The popularity of Geminus's book does, however, help to narrow the date to the 1540s and to a goldsmith engaging with the most popular trends of the day. Despite its lavish exterior, the interior of the girdle book is relatively plain. Paper inserts protect the backs of the cover panels[125] [Fig. 38], which, when removed, show the reverse of the cover images, confirming that the entirety of each panel is made of gold [Fig. 39].

Despite its age, small size, and fragile materials, the Tudor Girdle Book is remarkably well preserved. Even so, it does show minor wear in the enamel. Several letters in the inscriptions on both sides are missing enamel, as is the suspension loop above the image of Moses. These losses

[123] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 281.
[124] Maria Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 336.
[125] These inserts are likely modern additions.

are unsurprising as the setting for the enamel appears fairly shallow in both cases. In the case of the suspension loop, repeated impacts from a girdle chain could be the cause of this damage. There is enamel loss on both images as well. The artist appears to have poured liquid enamel into the recessed areas of the metal, allowing the hardened enamel to grip the panel. Since these parts of the enamel are the highest relief areas, the damage was likely caused during use. Still, the losses are minimal, suggesting this was not an item being worn daily. The book's case also survives [Fig. 40], but, as it is unknown if the case is original to the book or who it might have belonged to, I am not considering it at this time.[126] The existence of the case does demonstrate, that at some point in its history, this item would have been stored, like any precious piece of jewelry, for occasional wear.

The small size of the book belies its luxuriousness. The materials alone are of the most expensive kinds. While some Renaissance jewelry was made independently by jewelers, the most expensive pieces were mostly individual commissions.[127] The personal religious nature of the images on this book supports the idea that this book was commissioned by or for its first owner, rather than created for the open market. Personalization was commonplace for traditional book bindings, as well. Robert J.D. Harding makes a case for the political importance of luxury book bindings in Tudor England and refers to multiple personalized examples. One binder, Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker, was one of the first Englishmen to have his own private bindery: "He not only used it to bind books for his own use but more importantly in order to proselytize his own religious and antiquarian publications by providing luxury copies for

[126] The top of the case is embossed with fleurs-de-lys in all four corners of the lid. An additional four fleurs-de-lys are arranged in the shape of a cross in the center of the lid.
[127] Anna Somers Cocks, "The Status and Making of Jewellery, 1500–1630," in *Princely Magnificence: Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1630*, ed. Janet Arnold et al. (London: Debrett's Peerage in Association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1980), 5.

influential people such as Burghley and the queen."[128] One gift from Parker to Elizabeth, a 1572 copy of *De antiquitate,* is embroidered with images of a deer park, a possible play on Parker's name.[129] The choice of images for the Tudor Girdle Book was just as personal, reflecting the owner's personal religious beliefs and loyalty to the English crown.

JEWELRY AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

The creation of the Tudor Girdle Book coincides with a tumultuous end to Henry VIII's reign. England broke with Rome in 1532 when Henry formed the Church of England so that he could annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. The years immediately following the split were a booming time for jewelry creation. Hackenbroch proposes that Henry commissioned expensive decorative pieces to refashion himself as not just the head of England but also as the head of the new Anglican religion, a strategy in keeping with his self-fashioning over a decade earlier when he had attempted to "outshine" Francis I materially at the Field of Cloth of Gold.[130] The dissolution of English monasteries by Henry funded these commissions and in many cases produced the raw materials.[131] For example, in a letter to Thomas Cromwell in 1538, John Williams writes: "Have been to St. Edmund's Bury, where we found a rich shrine very cumbrous to deface. Have taken in the monastery over 5,000 mks. in gold and silver besides a rich cross with emeralds and stones of great value."[132] Numerous examples of post-Reformation jewelry with personal themes survive from sixteenth-century England, including the Darnley Jewel [Fig. 41], which belonged to Lady Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox, the

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[128] Robert J.D. Harding, "Authorial and Editorial Influence on Luxury Bookbinding Styles in Sixteenth-Century England," in *Tudor Books and Readers: Materiality and the Construction of Meaning*, ed. John N. King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 116.
[129] Harding, 117.
[130] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 267.
[131] Hackenbroch, 267.
[132] Hackenbroch, 267.

niece of Henry VIII by his sister Margaret Tudor.[133]

Old Testament themes were widely adopted by Protestants to avoid accusations of idolatry. This practice was common with Protestants on the continent, including in Germany where the Reformation had begun several decades earlier. Examples of Old Testament imagery on precious girdle books predate England's break with Rome. The Speke book panels, for example, include Susanna and the Elders and the Judgment of Solomon [Figs. 2 and 3]. However, the inscriptions on the Speke panels are in Latin, not English, which would have been more appropriate for a Catholic patron. The Old Testament imagery is specific to neither Catholics or Protestants. Even staunch Catholics like Mary I employed Old Testament imagery in her jewelry.[134] It is possible that the choice of scenes on the Tudor Girdle Book was conservative enough to avoid conflict at the end of Henry's reign, being acceptable to both sides of the religious debate, when he often wavered between reform and a more conservative return to previous traditions.[135]

THE BRAZEN SERPENT

The story of Moses and the Brazen Serpent takes place shortly after the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. In the Bible, the Israelites, tired from their journeys, cry out against God, who punishes them with "fiery" or poisonous serpents. Moses prays on behalf of his people, and God tells him to make a serpent out of bronze. When Moses raises the serpent on a staff before the sick and injured, those who had been bitten were cured.[136] The inscription on the Tudor Girdle Book is a quotation of the statement by God to Moses: "Make thee a fiery serpent and set it up

[133] Royal Collection Trust, "The Darnley Jewel or Lennox Jewel," Royal Collection Trust, accessed April 14, 2019, https://www.rct.uk/.
[134] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 282.
[135] Hackenbroch, 281.
[136] Numbers 21:4–10.

for a sign: that as many as are bitten may look upon it and live."[137] The image on the cover is the moment Moses raises the serpent, wrapped around a stick, above a crowd of several affected Israelites. Two figures stand on the left side of the image, while one figure reclines halfway across the bottom of the frame. This arrangement of the three figures gives a sense of the progression from near-death to full-health brought on by the sight of Moses's serpent, as if the figure on the ground will soon rise up and stand with the others. The image is otherwise simple, with a limited number of figures and colors. The four figures, Moses and the three Israelites, are sufficient to indicate the progress of the story and the sense of the crowd present for the miracle. The luminescent enamel colors, white for the figures' skin, green for the foliage of the trees and grassy hill, blue for the serpents, and black in additional areas, contrast with the gold ground and give the image a more luscious appearance by varying the texture of the surface, but they do not provide any substantial narrative or symbolic value. It is altogether a straightforward representation of the biblical scene.

This scene may have been included for several reasons, including talismanic properties. Hackenbroch suggests that "the choice of the Serpent, that might also be likened to that of Aesculapius, as the principal theme of decoration could possibly symbolize the gratitude of one who had survived the Plague of 1543."[138] The Rod of Aesculapius (Latin) or Asclepius (Greek) is the attribute of the Greco-Roman god of medicine by the same name and is most commonly a single serpent entwining a staff [Fig. 42]. The first implementation of the Rod of Aesculapius as a symbol of healing in England may have been by Henry VIII's personal physician, Sir William Butts.[139] The use of a girdle book as a protective or healing pendant is not without precedent.

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[137] Numbers 21:8.
[138] Hackenbroch, *Renaissance Jewellery*, 281.
[139] Bernice S. Engle, "The Use of Mercury's Caduceus as a Medical Emblem," *The Classical Journal* 25, no. 3 (1929): 204.

Prior to the Reformation, pendant bindings for storing relics were popular items for Catholic owners. The Dijon girdle book, with relics sewn into the cover, suggests exactly this kind of use. The Tudor Girdle Book does not include relics, which would be inappropriate for a Protestant noblewoman, but the idea that a jewelry pendant might offer a spiritual comfort, if not protection, could be a cultural holdover. The wholesale rejection of all things Catholic was not entirely immediate in England. For example, Stephen Gardiner, the bishop of Winchester, retained a moderate amount of power until the end of Henry's reign and vigorously supported the doctrine of transubstantiation.[140] It may be that the image of Moses on the Tudor Girdle Book is a kind of thanks-giving, as proposed by Hackenbroch, or a protective image, if the viewer associated the serpent and rod with healing generally.

More established is the connection between the Brazen Serpent and reform images. Protestants associated the Brazen Serpent with the Crucifixion of Christ.[141] Not only did it justify Christian faith in God, but just as the serpent healed the masses who witnessed it on Moses's staff, Christ's crucifixion on the cross was a spiritual balm for the faithful.[142] The destruction of the bronze serpent crafted by Moses during the purification of the Jewish Temple by King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:4 was also referenced by Henry's reformers as a justification for iconoclasm.[143] Moreover, images of Moses were popular with Henry, and he claimed Moses as a personal symbol for his leadership of the Church of England.[144] Moses is on the title pages of

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[140] Kathleen R. Sands, "The Doctrine of Transubstantiation and the English Protestant Dispossession of Demons," *History* 85, no. 279 (2000): 453–54.
[141] Tara Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 236–37. The typological association between the two biblical events comes from the Gospel of John (3:14) where he relates "Christ's own words as recorded in scripture: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."
[142] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 85.
[143] Hamling, *Decorating the "Godly" Household*, 236–38.
[144] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 74.

both the Cloverdale Bible and the Great Bible and is likely drawn from earlier German reform iconography likening the Reformation to a type of Exodus.[145] A 1524 broadsheet titled *Luther Leads the Faithful from Egyptian Darkness* [Fig. 43] is probably drawn from Luther's own commentaries on the Old Testament in which he compares the pope to a new Pharaoh.[146] The office seal of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, was the Brazen Serpent from 1530 onwards.[147] As a symbol with personal significance for both Henry and Protestant reformers, the front cover of the Tudor Girdle Book was well suited to life at court. This does not discount other contexts, such as funerals, but the connections to political happenings suggests it was specifically designed for wear at the royal court.

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

The second panel on the Tudor Girdle Book, the Judgment of Solomon, like Moses and the Brazen Serpent, had important associations with Henry's reign and the new Anglican Church. In this story from the life of King Solomon, two mothers come before the king and request that he resolve their dispute. Both mothers claim to be the true mother of the same child, and that the child of the other mother had died. In order to discover the truth, Solomon recommends dividing the living child in half, at which point the true mother agrees to give up the child rather than see it killed.[148] Like the other panel, the Tudor Girdle Book adopts a statement spoken during the narrative, in this case Solomon's pronouncement of the true mother, as a frame for the scene. The figure of Solomon, bearded with scepter in hand, sits on a throne under an arched space created by a short colonnade. He is dressed in a classicizing garb, which appears

[145] King, 74–75.
[146] King, 75.
[147] Harding, "Authorial and Editorial Influence," 127–28.
[148] 1 Kings 16–28.

to be a short tunic and knee-high boots. Below Solomon, on a plane created by a raked tile floor, there are five additional adult figures. The two figures on the left- and right-most sides of the picture plane are two bearded males, possibly Solomon's soldiers, who act as a crowd witnessing the event. One mother stands slightly to the right and in front of the leftmost male figure. The second mother is to her right, kneeling in profile with hands clasped in a pleading gesture; she may represent the "true mother" who begs Solomon not to kill her child.[149] Both children are represented. The body of the dead child lies on the tile floor, while the living child dangles by his foot from the hands of another male figure. This male figure wears a short tunic similar to Solomon's and holds a sword high with his right hand waiting for Solomon's order to divide the infant. Like the Brazen Serpent panel, the goldsmith has managed to convey additional moments from the story not captured in the framing quotation.

The choice of Solomon may have been a common one for figurative English girdle books since it was also the back-cover panel of the Speke Girdle Book. John King proposed that Solomon's pose in the Tudor Girdle Book is borrowed from an image of Henry as King Solomon by Hans Holbein [Fig. 44].[150] While Solomon was generally regarded as a symbol of wisdom and good judgment,[151] he enjoyed particular popularity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English art. Henry VIII's father, Henry VII had used the image of Solomon as a symbol of his wise rule. In 1486, the City of York presented a "tableau" of the six earlier English kings named Henry. In the performance, Henry VI passed the "scepter of Wisdom and Justice" to a figure representing King Solomon, a stand-in for Henry Tudor, the newly created Henry VII.[152] His

[149] Thank you to Dr. Jeffrey Chipps Smith, who pointed out that the good mother wears a longer dress than the false mother. This may suggest the purity, and therefore sincerity, of the good mother relative to the false mother.
[150] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 83.
[151] George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 64–65.
[152] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 28–35.

son, Henry VIII, employed Solomon to an even greater extent. Henry's inventory includes depictions of Solomon in a wide variety of media, including multiple tapestries.[153] A window in the King's College Chapel, Cambridge from 1535 shows Henry as Solomon with the Queen of Sheba, an allegory for the Church, submitting to him.[154] Henry had many reasons to compare himself with the Old Testament king and present himself as fair and moral. He was the first English monarch to inherit uncontested since the War of the Roses was ended by Henry VII's ascension and marriage to Elizabeth of York; even so, distant Plantagenet claimants to the throne still lived in England and posed a potential threat to Henry VIII's rule. After a century of conflict, the stable transition upon Henry VII's death was fortified by the idea that Henry VIII would also act as a wise and just ruler. By the early 1530s the comparison with Solomon was more pressing as Henry needed to justify his break from Rome and he had yet to secure his lineage with a son.

Solomon as a symbol of just rule was later employed by Henry's daughter, Elizabeth, who had her own difficulties related to religion and legitimacy during the early part of her reign. In her comparisons with Solomon, she likens herself to not only the divinely sanctioned and wise rule of the biblical Solomon, but also to the rule of her "Solomonic" father. Elizabeth's links with Henry and Solomon offered her own female rule more legitimacy, implying that she could rule like a man. Elizabeth was in the uneasy position of needing to defend her right to rule first because of her sex and second because many saw her parentage by Anne Boleyn as illegitimate. Additionally, her early reign reestablished Protestantism as the dominate faith in England after the death of her sister Mary I, who had reinstated Catholicism as the national religion. Early

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[153] Starkey, *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, 1997. Henry's inventories show that he owned two Arras hangings depicting Solomon (Item 9010). At Nottingham Castle, he kept a hanging depicting Solomon's wives (Item 13758) and two additional hangings of Solomon himself (Items 13753 and 13754).
[154] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 85–88.

textual references to Elizabeth as a new Solomon include the 1569 *Christian Prayers and Meditations* also known as *Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book*, which shows Elizabeth in front of her prayer book on the frontispiece [Fig. 45]. The text, "suggests Elizabeth, like Solomon, is an ideally religious ruler … who has reestablished the Lord's Temple by imposing a Protestant settlement in religion and bringing peace to England."[155] The title page of the same book includes the Tree of Jesse [Fig. 46], which "traces the descent of Mary and Christ from David, Solomon, and related Old Testament Kings."[156] The bottom of the page includes both the Tudor Rose and the Beaufort Portcullis, tying in the idea of Elizabeth's own royal lineage through her father and grandmother to Solomon as an ancestor of Mary and Christ.[157]

In addition to employing Solomon as a reference to her legitimacy, Elizabeth may have wished to be seen as a more even-tempered Solomon than her father. John King compares the images in *Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book* with Holbein's image of Henry as Solomon and concludes that

> The subtle variation of the motif of the Sword and the Book in the woodcut of "Elizabeth Regina" transforms Holbein's definitive image of monarchical power in the Cloverdale Bible into a portrayal of the queen as a Christlike Prince of Peace….A book of divine invocation receives clear priority over a weapon symbolic of Elizabeth's punitive capacity as an instrument of retributive justice. The truncation of the sword may be intended to suggest an optimistic belief that her Protestant settlement of religion has brought an end to the discord that wracked the reigns of her father and siblings….Unlike her father, Henry VIII, who rarely hesitated before applying harsh measures, Elizabeth styled herself as a Solomonic ruler who was slow to anger, but always capable of stern action … who prefers reading the book symbolic of divine wisdom and mercy to wielding the sword of military and judicial power.[158]

The continued relevancy of Solomon across the reigns of Henry and Elizabeth helps to explain

[155] King, 114.
[156] King, 112.
[157] King, 112.
[158] King, 115.

not only the choice of scenes on the Tudor Girdle Book around 1540, when England was still transitioning to the new Church, but the replacement of the interior text in 1574 as well. The images were still relevant over 30 years later during Elizabeth's reign, even if the original text was not. The Judgment of Solomon, when worn in a court context, expressed the wearer's alignment with her sovereign, whether Henry or Elizabeth, and the owner's acceptance of the new Anglican faith.

THE GOLDSMITH

The Brazen Serpent panel is also significant to the history of the scholarship on this book binding. Hugh Tait used the panel to attribute the Tudor Girdle Book to Hans of Antwerp, a Flemish artist working at Henry VIII's court. A remarkable amount is known about Hans of Antwerp, an artist for whom no works survive;[159] the scholarly interest in Hans of Antwerp is due in large part to his close friendship with Hans Holbein the Younger. Hans of Antwerp is thought to have begun working in London around 1520, although records of his commissions begin in 1537. He executed many items for Thomas Cromwell and at least one commission for Princess Mary, although in the case of the latter what work he completed is unknown.[160] There are no known records of commissions specifically for the king, but Hans of Antwerp was asked to deliver a letter, possibly to Holbein, instructing him to paint Anne of Cleves (r. January 1540–July 1540), in 1539. Hans of Antwerp remained at court until at least 1547, when a payment to him and Peter Richardson, another London goldsmith, was recorded for their services.[161] The closeness of Hans of Antwerp's relationship with Holbein is demonstrated not only in the

[159] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 44.
[160] Lionel Cust, "John of Antwerp, Goldsmith, and Hans Holbein," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 8, no. 35 (1906): 359.
[161] Cust, 359.

goldsmith's court commissions, possibly secured for him by his friend, but also by Holbein's will. Hans of Antwerp witnessed Hans Holbein's will and was named executor after the painter's death. After 1550, when Hans of Antwerp's son died, there are no additional records of the goldsmith's life or work.[162]

Tait's argument in favor of Hans of Antwerp rests on a similar image of Moses and the Brazen Serpent on a silver book cover by Hieronymus Mamacker, a Flemish goldsmith from Antwerp, for the Abbey of Tongerlo [Fig. 47] in Belgium. The large book cover, in addition to the plaque bearing the date 1543 [Fig. 48], includes Mamacker's maker's stamp and is still at the abbey for which it was created;[163] for these reasons, this attribution is not questioned. Tait argues that Hans either saw the original relief in Mamacker's Antwerp workshop on his way to Germany in 1539 or the design was brought to England by an assistant.[164] Tait states the dimensions of the two reliefs are almost identical, although the overall size of the Tongerlo Abbey book cover is substantially larger, and the compositions are also quite similar. To my knowledge, the only reproduction of the Tongerlo Abbey relief is Tait's [Fig. 49], which is difficult to make out. Tait's description of the two panels more adequately highlights their similarities and differences:

> Mamacker has introduced a number of serpents into the foreground, with horrifying effect, whereas the London goldsmith, not fully understanding, has omitted them and, for example, has replaced the snake coiled between the legs of the reclining nude in the foreground with a rather long and large hand. Similarly, the semi-nude female figure seated on the rocks to the left (behind the reclining male nude) is depicted by the London goldsmith as a fully-clothed standing figure, and the rocks have been omitted….Nevertheless, most details are faithfully repeated, even to the tree on the right and the classical style of short sleeve worn on the right shoulder and arm of the figure in profile on the extreme left, though the treatment of his hair is quite different, being far more conventional than that introduced by Hieronymus Mamacker. Perhaps the most

[162] Cust, 360.
[163] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 39.
[164] Tait, "Goldsmiths and Their Work at the Court of Henry VIII," 114.

> striking repetition is the kneeling bearded figure grasping the pole on which 'a fyrye serpent' has been set; even the type of pole and the serpent are remarkably similar, though the clouds in the sky (top left) and the little tree (to left of pole) have both been discarded by the London goldsmith.[165]

The undeniable similarities between these two works support the idea that they are in some way related. The London goldsmith may have been working from Mamacker's cover or even the reverse. It is also possible that they were working from a third model, such as a common print or image in another medium, that has yet to be connected to the book covers. Hans of Antwerp is one possible candidate, but with no works by him with which to compare these covers, Tait's conclusion is based on a series of assumptions that deserve to be questioned. Tait claims that the Tongerlo example was made first, but he does not settle on a date when Hans of Antwerp would have seen the design. He proposes that Hans either saw it in progress in Mamacker's studio in 1539 while traveling to Germany to deliver the king's letter to Holbein, or he saw the completed cover after 1543, a gap of four years sometime prior to which Tait assumes the Moses image had been created. The spelling on the girdle book covers, from either a 1539 or 1540 edition of the Bible, casts doubt on the idea that they were commissioned later than 1541, by which time the Sixth Great Bible was published with different spellings.[166] While it is not impossible that the goldsmith referenced an earlier English translation, as many copies were still in circulation, by 1543 many additional translations were available. There is no evidence that Mamacker was working on his cover as early as 1539 or 1540 and there is no record of where Hans of Antwerp may have stopped on his way to Germany or that he would have had access to Mamacker's book if he stopped in Antwerp.

Another problematic assumption by Tait is that the artist was foreign born based on the

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[165] Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 43.

[166] Tait, 45. In the Sixth Great Bible, the word "bytten" is spelled out completely, compared to the abbreviated form "byttē" found on the Tudor Girdle Book. The latter spelling matches the earlier bible editions.

spelling of the English inscriptions.[167] As a result he may have ignored other possible English-born candidates. In the sixteenth century, English spelling was not standardized, so there were no specific rules the goldsmith violated in his organization of the letters. Tait appears to take issue with the placement of decorative dots between words and how words were split as the text wrapped around the corners of the panel. In the Brazen Serpent panel, the goldsmith applied three dots on the short sides and four dots on the long. The long sides also include two additional markings: on the first long side, there is a colon after the word "syne," a punctuation taken from the source text indicating he was working from an example and not his own memory; and on the second-long side, a Greek cross marks the end of the passage. The addition of the end punctuation created by the cross creates an even spread of additional marks on both long sides, four dots and one punctuation mark. All the letters are of a similar enough size that the goldsmith's choice to split some words with dots and to compound others does not appear to be a mistake by a non-native English speaker, but rather a conscious decision to create a semi-symmetrical spread of text on a small surface.

The Judgment of Solomon panel has similar splits. The most questionable, and another possible reason that Tait assumes it is a foreign-born goldsmith, is the spelling of "the mother" as "THEMOT.HER." Again, I argue this was a stylistic necessity. The Solomon panel was even more difficult to space, as the passage quoted has an additional six characters. The artist still maintains a balance of three dots on the short sides and six dots on the long sides, the ending punctuation of a Greek cross serving as the final dot on the second long side. By splitting "mother" between the syllables, the dots are more evenly distributed along that side of the panel, rather than concentrated between shorter words at the beginning of the line.

[167] Tait, 44.

Although I have no goldsmith to propose as a replacement for Hans of Antwerp, I will point out that many others were known to be working in London and the surrounding areas. Peter Richardson, who was previously mentioned alongside Hans of Antwerp in a payment from Henry VIII, was in Katherine Parr's service in the 1540s according to records created at the time of Henry's death.[168] Another possibility is that the binding was the work of multiple hands. Hans Holbein created two designs for a girdle book for the Wyatt family [Figs. 8 and 9], which would have been executed by a separate goldsmith. It was probably commissioned by Thomas Wyatt for his wife Jane on the occasion of their marriage in 1537.[169] The Wyatts were important figures at court in the 1530s, and this design demonstrates not just that girdle books were popular commissions at the time but also that patrons sought out designs by favorite court artists.[170] Preparatory designs like the Holbein drawings were an opportunity for the patron to see and modify a design before it was finalized. If the spelling on the Tudor Girdle Book were truly an issue, as Tait contends, I doubt it would have been approved. If the goldsmith was a foreign-born artist, he could have been any number of foreign craftsmen near London at the time; a 2003 study indicates a large pool of candidates. Using mostly church and trial court records, the authors count 936 individual artists born in Antwerp who immigrated to London between 1501 and 1597. Of those, 26% were goldsmiths or jewelers.[171] Expanding beyond London, a large number of immigrants from the Low Countries settled in the area around Norwich. By the 1570s, there were an estimated 3,000 immigrants from the Netherlands and Belgium in Norwich in

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168 David Starkey, ed., *The Inventory of King Henry VIII: Textiles and Dress*, vol. 2 (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 96.
169 Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett,'" 37.
170 Tait, 38.
171 Maximiliaan Martens and Natasja Peeters, "'A Tale of Two Cities': Antwerp Artists and Artisans in London in the Sixteenth Century," in *Dutch and Flemish Artists in Britain, 1550–1800*, ed. Juliette Roding et al., *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 13 (Leiden: Primavera Pers, 2003), 32–37.

addition to 8,000 English-born natives.[172] Their study does not even include artists from many other parts of Europe working in London. Absent additional evidence connecting the Tudor Girdle Book to a specific hand, the large number of artists working in London and the surrounding area in the mid-sixteenth century precludes a definitive attribution to Hans of Antwerp.

CONCLUSION

The images on the Tudor Girdle Book were specifically chosen to proclaim the Protestant faith of its owner and her support of the newly Protestant sovereign, suggesting either a goldsmith well versed in the preferred imagery of Henry's court or the input of the patron in the design. While this imagery could have been acceptable in other contexts away from court, the specific associations between Henry and images of Moses and Solomon, point to this as a piece of jewelry commissioned first and foremost for wear at the royal court. The owner was possibly a lady in service to the queen or married to a high-ranking nobleman and expected to dress herself in the latest fashions the way Anne Basset described in her letter to Lady Lisle. This owner of the Tudor Girdle Book chose designs highly relevant to the early 1540s political situation and the struggle to establish the Church of England. Like other Tudor nobles who commissioned jewels promoting the new faith after 1533, the owner of the Tudor Girdle Book purchased a sumptuous piece of jewelry, made from the most expensive materials and with a high level of skill, suggesting a patron from among the wealthiest classes. A book of this quality was meant to be seen, and the owner, emboldened by the establishment of the Anglican Church, chose images appropriate for a good Protestant woman. Its continued use into the 1570s, in addition to playing into Elizabeth's own adoption of Solomon as a symbol of her rule, reflects a

[172] Martens and Peeters, 57.

move away from girdle decorations that were undeniably Catholic, like rosaries or small reliquaries, both of which were banned during Elizabeth's time.[173] The Tudor Girdle Book, unlike the other surviving girdle book examples, appears to have been deliberately constructed to shine in the halls and palaces of Henry's newly Protestant England.

[173] Moira Hook and Arthur MacGregor, *Tudor England: Archaeological and Decorative Art Collections in the Ashmolean Museum from Henry VII to Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2000), 40.

Chapter 3: Women Who Read

While the Tudor Girdle Book is a product of environments and trends that crossed gender boundaries—from Tudor jewelry design to the emerging English Protestantism—it cannot be divorced from its strictly gendered usage. Girdle books were worn solely by women, and it seems no coincidence that it was created in the 1540s, during the ascendancy of Protestant women at Henry's court. The gendered nature of this specific girdle book is further amplified by the replacement text inserted in the 1570s, a set of prayers written by a woman. It has been suggested that Elizabeth Tyrwhit's prayers were the product of a political "interest in ancient devotion" starting in the 1560s, which includes the previously mentioned *Christian Prayers and Meditations* by John Day with an image of Elizabeth I at prayer.[174] The proposed purpose of this "revival" was the creation of a Protestant lineage from Henry VIII to Elizabeth.[175] The idea of Tyrwhit's writings as a revival text is appealing as it helps explain why it was cut down to fit an older binding with imagery that also recalls the initial triumph of English Protestantism in the 1530s and '40s.

The 1540s, in addition to seeing a turbulent end to Henry's reign (d. 1547), was a period of change in women's education. The sixteenth century saw an explosion in women's literacy, to which the English market readily responded: "in the period from 1475 through 1640 at least 163 books in some 500 editions were specifically directed to or printed for women readers."[176] At the same time, "more middle-class women were learning to read, too, at least in English … [as] women were not permitted to study in the universities, and … grammar schools where Latin was

[174] Felch, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers*, 54–55.
[175] Felch, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers*, 54–55.
[176] Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475–1640* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1982), 1.

taught."[177] This change, and the role of Tudor women in religious circles, is best embodied by Henry's last queen, Katherine Parr. In addition to publishing her own works, she surrounded herself with like-minded upper-class Protestant ladies. She supported the education of Henry's daughters, even helping to bring about their reconciliation with their father after periods of exile from court.[178] The queen was the trend setter for women of the English court, and Queen Katherine declared women's scholarship to be fashionable. It would not be unthinkable to imagine that the Tudor Girdle Book was made for someone near to or in her circle of female reformist thinkers, an association with continued relevance into the 1570s when Tyrwhit's text was introduced.

ELIZABETH TYRWHIT'S *MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS*

The text in the Tudor Girdle Book is the only extant example of the 1574 edition of Elizabeth Tyrwhit's *Morning and Evening Prayers*, although in 1582 a longer version was published in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones*, of which there are many copies.[179] Given that the copy in the girdle book was cut down, it is unlikely that it was printed specially for this binding. The first printing may have simply been limited to a small number of texts for private use among Tyrwhit's friends and family and not the wider public. It was not unusual to see texts modified to fit into a girdle book, rather than created for a specific binding. The German girdle book in Dijon [Fig. 13] is an example of this practice; beautiful bindings could be reused and re-purposed. A set of prayers, or a similarly meditative religious text, was typical of girdle books. A popular option was the set of seven penitential psalms of King David,

[177] Hull, 3.
[178] James, *Kateryn Parr*, 135–37.
[179] Felch, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers*, 51–58.

> who was presumed to have composed them to give voice to his sorrow for his adultery with Bathsheba, his sending her husband Uriah to be killed in battle, and also his later sins of pride. The Roman monk Cassiodorus in the sixth century referred to this group of psalms as a sevenfold means of obtaining forgiveness.[180]

The Italian girdle book in the Walters collection contains these psalms [Fig. 36]. By contrast, the Tyrwhit *Prayers* is a uniquely English text meant for an English audience, reflecting a late sixteenth-century interest in the foundations of English Protestantism.

Elizabeth Oxenbridge Tyrwhit was born sometime before 1510 to an upper-class Sussex family. Her father, Sir Goddard Oxenbridge of Brede, and her mother, Anne Fiennes, held substantial lands in England and were of sufficient status to secure a place at court for their daughter Elizabeth, who was a lady of the Privy Chamber to Queen Jane Seymour by 1538.[181] Through her correspondence, we know Tyrwhit was well acquainted with the same Anne Basset and Lady Lisle discussed in earlier chapters and that by 1539 she was married to Robert Tyrwhit but continued to serve at court after her marriage.[182] Robert Tyrwhit was a cousin to Katherine Parr's first husband, Edward Borough. Susan Felch, who has compiled the most comprehensive study on Elizabeth Tyrwhit and her writings, suggests that Parr and Tyrwhit knew each other before Parr's queenship through this family connection.[183] Felch goes on to argue that, although John Foxe does not mention Tyrwhit by name in his 1570 account of Katherine Parr's ladies, specifically those who gathered to hear Protestant sermons in Parr's chambers, Tyrwhit "almost certainly would have been among those who were 'disposed to heare.'"[184] Tyrwhit's close ties to

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[180] Virginia Chieffo Raguin, "Private Prayer and Books of Hours," in *Catholic Collecting, Catholic Reflection 1538–1850: Objects as a Measure of Reflection on a Catholic Past and the Construction of a Recusant Identity in England and the United States*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 85.
[181] Felch, *Elizabeth Tyrwhit's Morning and Evening Prayers*, 1–3.
[182] Felch, 3.
[183] Felch, 4.
[184] Felch, 4–5.

the queen are evident in her being singled out for questioning in the 1546 plot against Katherine. According to Foxe, Henry's more conservative advisers, Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester, and the Lord Chancellor, Thomas Wriothesley attempted to persuade Henry to bring charges of treason against the queen due to her reformist beliefs. They planned to question several of her ladies, including Tyrwhit, for evidence against Parr, although the king and queen reconciled before the plan was carried out.[185] Elizabeth Tyrwhit remained with Katherine Parr until Parr's death in 1548.[186]

After the deaths of both Henry VIII and Katherine Parr, the Tyrwhits continued to remain connected to happenings at court. They were, for a time, the guardians to Princess Elizabeth.[187] More surprisingly, they did well under the reign of Mary I, despite their Protestant leanings and Mary's violent reinstatement of Catholicism. Felch accords this seemingly incongruous relationship to Mary's prior acquaintance with Elizabeth Tyrwhit while Mary was still a princess and formed a friendship with Katherine Parr. Parr was instrumental in helping reconcile Mary with her father the king and included Mary in her theological discussions with her other ladies; this friendly relationship may have extended to others like Elizabeth Tyrwhit.[188] However, the Tyrwhits' prosperity under Mary did not continue under Queen Elizabeth, who possibly harbored resentment towards the couple from their short tenure as her guardians.[189] Still, life in an England once again under a Protestant monarch may have been somewhat of a relief for the Tyrwhit family.

In her opening remarks on Tyrwhit as a writer, Felch describes the aforementioned

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[185] Felch, 5–6.
[186] Felch, 7–8.
[187] Felch, 11.
[188] Felch, 13.
[189] Felch, 11–14. Elizabeth's letters from her teenage years under the Tyrwhits' roof suggests she was deeply unhappy with the arrangement and resented Robert Tyrwhit's overbearing and intrusive guardianship.

legend surrounding the Tudor Girdle Book, that it was given to Princess Elizabeth around 1554 when she was confined in the Tower by Mary, and Felch discusses the possibility that it was a manuscript edition of Tyrwhit's prayers that was given to Elizabeth at this time. Given the 20-year gap between the printing of Tyrwhit's writing and this event, and the coolness of the relationship between Tyrwhit and Princess Elizabeth, this also seems unlikely. More probable is a later association made between tangentially linked objects and people, all centered around the scholarly circle created by Katherine Parr. The Tudor Girdle Book, in fact, appears specifically re-crafted into an object meant to recall this earlier moment. It is a combination of a jewelry object synonymous with the court style of the 1530s and '40s and a text strongly linked to the theological fashions among noblewomen during Katherine's reign.

THE EDUCATED TUDOR WOMAN

If Katherine Parr is emblematic of a specific moment for Tudor women, where participation in reformist thought was a fashionable aspect of court life, the roots of this fashion stretch back well before her marriage to Henry VIII. The sixteenth century more generally was a time of increased woman's education and readership. As previously discussed in relation to the group portrait of Thomas More's family, More ordered his children's tutors to teach both his sons and daughters.[190] More found justification for the education of women in antiquity, citing the education given to the daughters of both Ovid and Cicero.[191] Texts specifically designed to instruct the reader on how to educate young women—Renaissance parental how-to books—appeared in England early in Henry's reign. Juan Luis Vives's *The Education of a Christian Woman* was published in 1523, first in Latin, and then translated into English in 1529. The

[190] Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman*, 157.
[191] Benson, 160.

dedication to Catherine of Aragon implies it was intended as a guide for the education of Princess Mary.[192] The dedication makes clear that Vives viewed the education of women, specifically noblewomen who would become the wives of powerful men, as essential to the interests of the state.[193] While Vives recommends reading and education for transmitting moral concepts to women and girls, he stops there and does not recommend that they write or translate works themselves.[194] Furthermore, he claims that women should not study rhetoric, as they did not need to be persuasive in public; their education was instead meant for interior development.[195] His views mirror the idea behind objects like books of hours or girdle books used for private prayer and spiritual edification. Richard Hyrde, a former tutor to Thomas More's children, wrote the English translation of Vives's manual, which is more suggestive of a new openness to women's education. An English translation was more accessible to women, who were less likely to know Latin.[196] Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defense of Good Women* goes even further and proposes an equality of sorts between men and women, as he explains that an educated woman is capable of governing.[197] Although it was not published until 1540 and was dedicated to Henry's then queen, Anne of Cleves, Elyot's book was started during the reign of Catherine of Aragon. Elyot initially intended his story about the Queen of Zenobia as an allegory to persuade Catherine to assume the regency in the event of a revolt against Henry VIII.[198]

Even if the roots of the increase in education for women and girls stretches back to before the Reformation, the emphasis on the importance of text in the new religion only accelerated the

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[192] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England,* 36.
[193] King and Rabil Jr., "Introduction," xxxii.
[194] Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman,* 173.
[195] Eales, *Women in Early Modern England,* 36.
[196] Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman,* 180.
[197] Benson, 183.
[198] Benson, 184.

process. English Protestantism was heralded by a wave of printed books. By 1520, Cardinal Wolsey was struggling to stem the tide of Lutheran books finding their way from the continent.[199] The first large scale printing of an English vernacular Bible was the Tyndale Bible of the 1520s, which was translated in Germany by William Tyndale and printed en masse in Antwerp beginning in 1524.[200] Between 1538 and 1541, Henry ordered vernacular Bibles to be placed in all parish churches,[201] which would have provided direct access to any woman educated enough to read in the vernacular. Among the complaints made against Anne Askew, whose writings and trial I will discuss later in this chapter, was her habit of reading the English Bible kept at Lincoln Cathedral for public use and arguing with the clergy over it.[202] The primacy of the Word among Protestants in combination with the increased interest in educating women makes the girdle book a symbol of this cultural environment. The book could be both the direct practical tool for the attainment of knowledge and the personal emblem of a woman's interest in her own development. This connection is emphasized by the reverse practice: placing a personal badge on one's book. Anne Boleyn owned books emblazoned with both her and Henry's initials in gold.[203] Anne also added her personal falcon crest to a French manuscript in her collection. The text may have been written by the French evangelical and reformist Clement Marot.[204] When the Tudor Girdle Book was created in the 1540s, the culture of the Tudor court was already emphasizing the fashion of reading for women. The reign of a Protestant queen, who publicly championed the education of Henry's daughters and her ladies and published her own writings, provided the conditions for the book as stylish accessory.

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[199] David Loades, *Politics, Censorship, and the English Reformation* (New York: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 110.
[200] J. W. Martin, *Religious Radicals in Tudor England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), 71.
[201] Martin, 71.
[202] Zahl, *Five Women*, 29.
[203] James P. Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII and His Wives* (London: The British Library, 2004), 124.
[204] Carley, 125.

KATHERINE PARR AND FEMALE REFORMISTS

Katherine Parr exemplifies this archetypal educated Tudor noblewoman. Even before she married Henry in 1543, she had learned Latin, Greek, French, and possibly Italian.[205] As queen, she would have inherited a large book collection from her predecessors, although most would have remained in the royal inventory as possessions of the state and not been kept by Katherine in her widowhood, so her access to the royal texts is merely assumed. After Henry's death, she married her fourth husband, Thomas Seymour. As she predeceased him, her books from that time remained part of his estate, which was inventoried in 1549, when he was executed for treason. Among these were many distinctly Protestant books including a large "Newe Testament in Frenche,"[206] suggesting a continued interest in Protestant texts. It was possibly Katherine's education that attracted Henry to her in the first place. John Foxe's posthumous account of Katherine Parr's tenure as queen describes how she would argue with Henry over matters of theology.[207] Her penchant for debate may have factored into the 1546 plot to depose her. Foxe claims Stephen Gardiner overheard these theological discussions and convinced Henry that she was a heretic trying to subvert him. When Katherine heard about Gardiner's claims, she prostrated herself before Henry in his chambers and was able to persuade him of her innocence.[208] While this account is probably embellished, it suggests she was a clever and persuasive woman.

Additional evidence of Katherine's cleverness and the most exceptional aspect of Katherine's reign is her writing. She was the first queen of England to publish under her own name and one of only a handful of European female monarchs to publish at all. A notable

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[205] Zahl, *Five Women*, 41.
[206] Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII*, 138.
[207] Zahl, *Five Women*, 42–43.
[208] Zahl, 42–43.

counterpart to Katherine Parr is Marguerite de Navarre, author of the *Heptameron*, which was published posthumously in 1558.[209] There are few models one can point to in England for Parr, although some noblewomen translated works by male authors. Margaret Beaufort, grandmother of Henry VIII, translated part of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis in 1504 and *Mirror of Gold for the Sinful* in 1506.[210] Parr published her first book, *Prayers or Meditations*, with Henry's permission in June of 1546. She has been called "the first certain instance" of a female writer in England, as this first book predates even Anne Askew's 1546 *First* and 1547 *Latter Examination*.[211] Parr owned multiple copies of her own first book, including some in luxury bindings of crimson velvet.[212] After Henry's death in 1547, Parr published her second book *The Lamentation of a Sinner*. A blatantly anti-Catholic book, it not only makes her Protestant views clear but utilizes similar symbolism to that on the covers of the Tudor Girdle Book. She refers to Henry as "our Moyses" for his role in ushering in the Reformation in England and taking a stand against the pope, whom she characterizes as a modern day "Pharao." The metaphor recalls the image of Moses receiving God's law on the Cloverdale Bible title page and also Martin Luther's own characterization of the pope as the Old Testament tyrant.[213]

Parr's writing, but more importantly the people she assembled in her queenly chambers, galvanized a culture of women's religious scholarship at the Tudor court. Among those who spoke to Parr and her ladies was Anne Askew, who was viewed by many as a radical Protestant. Askew had some familial connections to the nobility, which may have been how she became

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[209] Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, trans. Paul Chilton (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 7.
[210] Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 115–16.
[211] Janel Mueller, "Complications of Intertextuality: John Fisher, Katherine Parr and 'The Book of the Crucifix,'" in *Texts and Cultural Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Cedric C. Brown and Arthur F. Marotti (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 17.
[212] Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII*, 138.
[213] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 75.

friends with Parr and with the queen's ladies Jane Grey and Catherine Willoughby.[214] In 1546 she was arrested, tortured, and accused of heresy for, among other things, denying transubstantiation, but she refused to name the queen or any of her ladies as fellow heretics.[215] The case against Anne may have been a ploy to remove Katherine Parr. By this time, Henry was gravely ill and his conservative advisers worried he would name a Protestant regent, maybe even the queen. They attempted to weaken Katherine's position and therefore the position of the Protestants at court by condemning Anne and torturing her into naming Katherine as a heretic.[216] Askew withstood her interrogators but was ultimately burned at the stake. Her status as a "martyr" to the Protestant cause was almost instantaneous. She appears in a woodcut in John Bale's 1547 publication, *Examinacyon of Anne Askew* with a martyr's palm frond [Fig. 50].[217]

As the lives and actions of Katherine Parr and Anne Askew demonstrate, women were at the heart of radical Protestant movements in the 1540s and actively engaging in public debates about the new faith. These were the very kind of women who would have owned something like the Tudor Girdle Book; this moment is what Elizabeth Tyrwhit's writings recall 30 years later.

The images on the Tudor Girdle Book depict a feminine trope literally enacted several years later by Katherine Parr to subvert the 1546 plot: the pleading woman. The image of Solomon and the kneeling mother, which casts Henry as Solomon after Holbein's image, almost appears to foretell the event's denouement, with Katherine Parr in the role of the good mother. Even if the image does not literally represent Parr, as it was probably made somewhat earlier, Foxe's popular story about the plot demonstrates the appeal an image of a contrite woman had for Henry, likely even at the time of the Tudor Girdle Book's creation. Specifically, both Parr in

[214] Zahl, *Five Women*, 28.
[215] Zahl, 28–31.
[216] Zahl, 42.
[217] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 207–9.

life and the good mother on the Tudor Girdle Book submit wholly to a man's judgment, a desirable image after a string of wives who failed to meet Henry's expectations. Pleading was a viable and socially acceptable way for a woman to argue on her own behalf or on behalf of others. If women could not be considered persuasive with the logic of their arguments, because they were not trained as rhetoricians,[218] then they could be persuasive in their appeals to emotion. This concept even has a classical precedent in the Sabine women who begged for an end to the war between their fathers and their husbands at Rome's founding.[219] England had its own historical models for the pleading woman. In 1347, the then pregnant Queen Philippa, knelt before her husband King Edward III and begged for the lives of the conquered citizens of Calais.[220] Furthermore, a supplicant woman is depicted three times on sixteenth-century English girdle books, despite the limited number of surviving examples. Both the Tudor Girdle Book and the Speke Girdle Book panels include an image of the good mother before Solomon [Figs. 3 and 5]. A third example, also from the Speke Girdle Book, is the image of Susanna [Fig. 2]. Rather than choosing to portray the more common image of Susanna watched or approached by the Elders [Fig. 51], the panel shows the resulting trial of Susanna by Daniel, including a Latin inscription, which translates to: "Return to the place of judgement, for they have given false testimony against her."[221] Susanna, having petitioned before Daniel, successfully persuades him of her innocence. As a final note, with the exception of Susanna, in all of the cases I have mentioned, the woman notably functions in a role of wife or mother as well as the archetypal

[218] Alison Thorne and Jennifer Richards, "Introduction," in *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4–5.
[219] Rachel Heard, "Caught *in Medias Res*: Female Intercession, 'Regulation' and 'Exchange,'" in *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (New York: Routledge, 2007), 59.
[220] Ward, *Women in England*, 129.
[221]The Latin inscription reads: "+ REDITE. IN. IVDITVM QUIA ISTI FALSVM IN ANC TESTIMONIVM.DIX.ERVNT." Tait, "Girdle Prayer Book (Entry 11)," 50.

pleading woman.[222] They stand in stark contrast to women like Anne Askew, who had abandoned her husband's household, another crime against her character.[223] Women like Anne argued, they did not plead, when they tried to persuade others.

CONCLUSION

The choice of images for the Tudor Girdle Book is a consequence of the cultural conditions of the 1540s, a circumstance deliberately referenced after the 1570s when Elizabeth Tyrwhit's text was inserted into the binding. For the original owner, the binding was an emblem of a court environment in which noblewomen took pride in their education and actively engaged each other in religious debate. The Tudor Girdle Book stops short of suggesting that the owner should bring her arguments to men's debates; the good mother before Solomon was an appropriate Old Testament model for the woman's comportment, as she submits to male judgment. A possible reason in the 1570s to revive this symbol of women's roles in the Reformation is the reign of England's first female Protestant queen. By the publication of Tyrwhit's *Prayers,* Elizabeth I was well into the second decade of her reign, but she continued to be dogged by accusations that she was unfit to rule, by circumstances of her birth, by her gender, her lack of a husband or heir, and her religion. The Tudor Girdle Book binding uses strongly Protestant imagery that alludes to the rule of Henry and by extension Elizabeth. The Tyrwhit text, modeled after writers like Katherine Parr, amplifies associations that the medium of the girdle book had with women's roles in advancing Protestantism.

[222] Heard, "Caught *in Medias Res*: Female Intercession, 'Regulation' and 'Exchange,'" 68.
[223] Zahl, *Five Women*, 28–29.

Conclusion

The challenge posed by the British Museum's Tudor Girdle Book is to construct a picture of its creation and use at the English court with a limited set of facts about the object. While the girdle book as a genre has precedent in medieval books of hours and the medieval leather girdle book, the date and location of the first small precious girdle book remains unknown. To combat this uncertainty, I have proposed that the precious girdle book developed along with the early hooped skirt, the Spanish farthingale, which was likely introduced to England through Catherine of Aragon when she married Arthur Tudor and later Henry VIII. The lack of surviving examples of English girdle books, an additional roadblock to understanding their use, is mitigated by a number of portraits of women with their precious bindings as well as references to these objects in inventories and letters. This supplemental evidence explains how the precious girdle book was held, how it was worn down the length of woman's skirt, and how they became an essential decoration for court life. With regards to precious girdle book design, I have only scratched the surface. Despite an established visual similarity between the black enamel designs on the Tudor Girdle Book and English jewelry design books, an in-depth exploration into the roots of these designs in continental and Islamic sources is beyond the scope of this study. Further attention to the design of the binding's furniture (i.e. the spine, claps, and hooks) might offer more conclusive evidence in favor of Hans of Antwerp or another London goldsmith as the creator of the Tudor Girdle Book. As it stands, the evidence used to propose Hans of Antwerp in the first place seems too circumstantial to allow for a definitive attribution.

What light has been shed on the Tudor Girdle Book by other scholars has in many respects been limited to the physical characteristics of the object and to a lesser extent the iconography of Moses and Solomon as early Reformation images. These studies have largely ignored the gendered

issues posed by the binding: it was used exclusively by female owners at a moment when women were essential players in the formation of English Protestantism. Beginning with Anne Boleyn, whose relationship with Henry VIII sparked England's break with Rome, and continuing to one of her successors, Katherine Parr, women were at the heart of debates regarding the new religion at the Tudor court. Perhaps it is precisely because precious girdle books were used solely by women that they have been relatively ignored or treated less seriously than other media, like painting or drawing. Yet, the figurative images on the Tudor Girdle Book are directly connected to these kinds of two-dimensional forms, specifically to artists like Holbein and others in the 1530s and '40s creating drawings and prints comparing Henry VIII to symbolic Old Testament predecessors.

The irony in the lack of modern interest in the Tudor Girdle Book is the documented interest subsequent generations in the early modern period had for this and other precious girdle books. This interest is evinced by the cult-like legends attached to these books. By the eighteenth century, a story that the Tudor Girdle Book was given to Elizabeth I during her confinement in the Tower by Queen Mary was scribbled onto a now lost piece of parchment tucked into the binding. The nature of this tale is strikingly similar to a legend attached to the John Croke girdle book, that Anne Boleyn passed it to a lady-in-waiting on her way to the scaffold. While there is no evidence that either legend is true, they suggest something elemental about these objects. They were intimately connected to their owners through touch. Despite a girdle book's small size, those with interior texts show that they were functional objects, often containing religious prayers or psalms. Unlike other items of jewelry worn on a woman's dress or elsewhere on the body, portraits of women with their girdle books prove that they were often seen in their owner's hands. Their portability allowed them to be carried at all times and consulted throughout the day. Accessibility meant that they could provide comfort in any moment of need, making them a logical object to

place in the hands of Anne or Elizabeth in their darkest moments. The plausibility of the girdle book at these events is not the only reason to imagine them there. By the seventeenth century Anne Boleyn was no longer the villain designed by her contemporaneous detractors. Anne's actions heralded the English Reformation, and she was mother to one of England's greatest Protestant monarchs. The girdle book legends suggest the bindings are in a way a touch relic of the most famous women of the sixteenth century.

A tension in this thesis has been how to classify the Tudor Girdle Book: is it principally a decorative jewelry object, a set of two-dimensional images, or the container of a text? The branding of a girdle book as a touch relic of early English Protestantism, spurred by these popular legends, helps to clarify that the Tudor Girdle Book is all three. The scholar James Kearney has grappled with the question of what role books played in the English Reformation and "how were books imagined."[224] His answer is that the sixteenth century saw "a crisis of the book," in which the worship of texts was nearing idolatry; both text and images were visual media susceptible to this behavior.[225] Kearney's position is that text was problematic for English Protestants—particularly by Elizabeth's reign—as Protestant focus on books mirrored Catholic worship of idols and relics.[226] His theory supports the relic associations with girdle books, which I have furthered here. Due to these associations, however, Kearney sees the text as approaching the problems of Catholic objects; I argue instead that the Tudor Girdle Book is evidence of the opposite. Its continued use in the 1570s implies that, at least for some, the book was not problematic, but a useful reinforcement of the new faith. Not only was the Tudor Girdle Book revived in the 1570s, but the replacement text strongly reinforced associations with the female protestants of the 1540s, as

[224] James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1.
[225] Kearney, 26–27.
[226] Kearney, 180–84.

Elizabeth Tyrwhit's text was modeled on the writings of other earlier women, like Katherine Parr. The connection between the Tudor Girdle Book and foundational Protestant Tudor women was an incredibly useful argument in favor of the supremacy of the Anglican Church and the rule of a Protestant woman; even if the logic came from Catholic relics, the ends justified the means. Where decorative jewel, religious image, and text meet in the Tudor Girdle Book, it becomes a relic for a Protestant age, supplanting the overtly Catholic objects worn by Tudor women in pre-Reformation decades.

In 1580, John Lyly described the noblewomen of the English court, "who have theyr bookes tyed to theyr gyrdles, not fethers, who are as cunning in ye scriptures, as you [Italian women][sic] are in *Ariosto* or *Petrarck*."[227] For nearly fifty years after Henry VIII first declared himself head of the Church of England, the noblewomen of the Tudor court flaunted their girdle books, which were easily recognized as symbols of their appetite for religious reading. While the Tudor Girdle Book may have developed from more overtly Catholic forms of decoration, pendant images and relics hung from the girdle chain, it quickly developed into a new emblem for the Protestant women of Henry's court. This trend was initially galvanized by the cultural fashion of educating women and girls but it reached its apogee through the visibility of prominent women translating and publishing their own writing. By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Tudor Girdle Book's associations with the trend of educating Protestant women were undeniable.

The Tudor Girdle Book communicates this history through its multidimensionality. The exterior images, although unchanging, remained entirely appropriate through several decades of religious uncertainty. The Old Testament scenes were acceptable to both religious conservatives and reformists. The interior text was adapted to the owner's preference, allowing for a flexibility

[227] Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 138.

necessary to conform to the fickle fashions of the court. Fashion is often conceived of as an exterior reflection of its owner's interior self. As a metaphor for a Tudor lady, the Tudor Girdle Book communicates the precariousness of court life. The binding survived religious reforms and returns to conservative worship under the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth. Just as the skilled lady at court adapted to her conditions, so did the Tudor Girdle Book.

Figures

Figure 1: The Tudor Girdle Book, Hans (John) of Antwerp (?), London, 1540s, Height 6.5 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum website.

Figure 2: Speke Book Panel, “Susanna and the Elders before Daniel,” Artist Unknown, English, c. 1510–1525, 6.6 cm x 4.4 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum website.

Figure 3: Speke Book Panel, “Judgment of Solomon,” Artist Unknown, English, c. 1510–1525, 6.6 cm x 4.4 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum website.

Figure 4: Detail of the Tudor Girdle Book, "Moses and the Brazen Serpent," Hans (John) of Antwerp (?), London, 1540s, 6.5 cm x 5.6 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum website.

Figure 5: Detail of the Tudor Girdle Book, "Judgment of Solomon," Hans (John) of Antwerp (?), London, 1540s, 6.5 cm x 5.6 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum website.

Figure 6: Interior of the John Croke Book with a Portrait of Henry VIII, Artist Unknown, English, 1540, 4.0 cm x 3.0 cm, The British Library. After the British Library website.

Figure 7: Exterior of the John Croke Book, Artist Unknown, English, 1540, 4.0 cm x 3.0 cm, The British Library. After the British Library website.

Figure 8: [First] Design for a Metalwork Book Cover, Hans Holbein the Younger, Pen and black ink with black, grey, and yellow wash on paper, English, c. 1537, 8.1 cm x 6 cm, The British Museum. After Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 9: [Second] Design for a Metalwork Book Cover, Hans Holbein the Younger, Pen and black ink with black, grey, and yellow wash on paper, English, c. 1537, 7.9 cm x 5.9 cm, The British Museum. After the British Museum Website.

Figure 10: “The Virgin in a Church with Mary of Burgundy at her Devotions” from *Mary of Burgundy's Book of Hours*, The Master of Mary of Burgundy, Flemish, c. 1477, 22.5 cm x 16.3 cm, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. Folio 14v. After Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 11: Girdle Book of Hieronymus Kress, Artist Unknown, Leather with brass fittings, German, 1471, 42 cm in length, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. Photograph by Andreas Franzkowiak, after Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 12: *St. Catherine of Siena Besieged by Demons*, Artist Unknown, Polish, c. 1500, National Museum in Warsaw. After Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 13: Exterior of a German Girdle Book with Relics, Artist Unknown, German, 15th century, 6.5 cm x 4.4 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. After Collections du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon website.

Figure 14: Interior of a German Girdle Book with Images of the Virgin and the Resurrection, Artist Unknown, German, 15th century, 6.5 cm x 4.4 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon. After Collections du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon website.

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Figure 16: “The Court of Love” from *Art d'amour*, Netherlands, before 1483, The British Library. Royal 16 F II f. 1. After the British Library website.

Figure 17: “Christine de Pisan” from *Cité des Dames*, Master of the Cité des Dames, French, c. 1410–14, The British Library. Harley 4431 f. 3. After the British Library website.

Figure 18: Tomb Effigy of Elizabeth of York and Henry VII, English, c. 1509, Westminster Abbey. After the Westminster Abbey Library website.

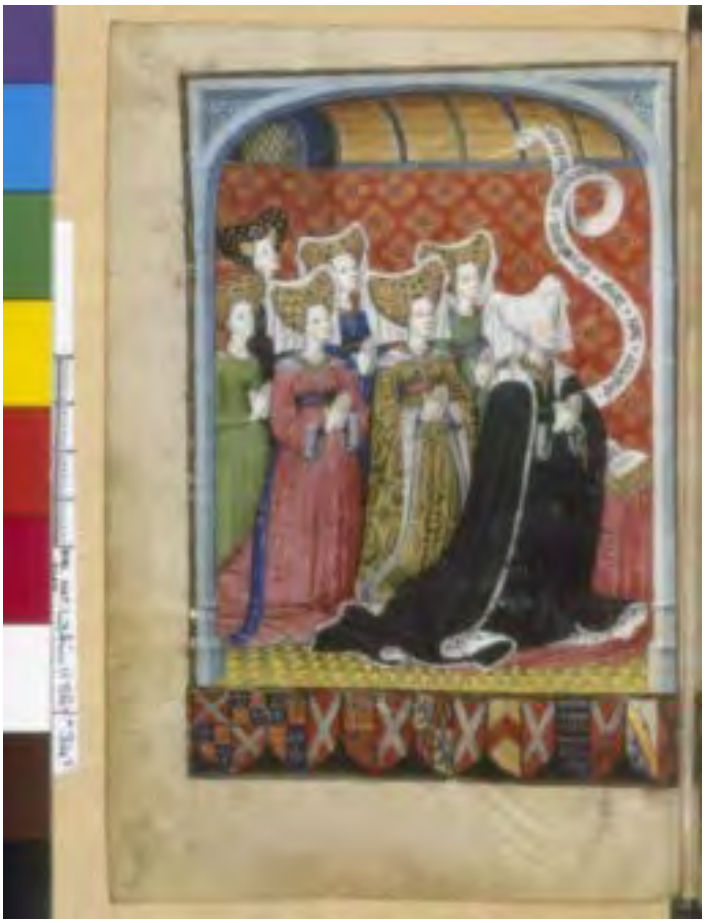

Figure 19: “Joan Beaufort and her Daughters” from *The Hours of Neville,* Paris, c. 1427–32, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Folio 34v. After the Bibliothèque nationale de France website.

Figure 20: “The Marriage of Henry V and Catharine of Valois” from *Chronicles of France*, French, 1487, The British Library. Royal 20 E VI f. 9v. After the British Library website.

Figure 21: “Herod’s Banquet” from the *St. John Retable*, Pedro García de Benabarre, Spanish, 1445–85, Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya. After the Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya website.

Figure 22: *Portrait of Queen Katherine Parr*, Master John, Oil on panel, English, c. 1545, The National Portrait Gallery London. After the National Portrait Gallery website.

Figure 23: *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* ("The Hampden Portrait"), Steven van der Meulen, Oil on canvas, English, c. 1563, Private Collection. After Wikimedia Commons.

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Figure 25: *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* ("The Ditchley Portrait"), Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, Oil on canvas, English, c. 1592, The National Portrait Gallery London. After the National Portrait Gallery website.

Figure 26: Drawing of Four Citizens' Wives from *Corte Beschryuinghe van Engheland, Schotland, ende Irland*, Lucas de Heere, English, 1573–75, The British Library. MS 28330 f. 33r. After the British Library website.

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Figure 40: The Tudor Girdle Book Case, Artist Unknown, London (?), 1540s (?), The British Museum. Photograph provided by the British Museum.

Figure 41: The Darnley Jewel or Lennox Jewel, Artist Unknown (possibly George Heriot, Michael Gilbert II or James Gray), Gold, enamel (émail en ronde bosse, émail basse-taille), Burmese rubies, Indian emerald and cobalt-blue glass, Scottish (?), 1571–78, 6.6 cm x 5.2 cm, Palace of Holyroodhouse. After the Royal Collection Trust website.

Figure 42: “Valgrisi, Vincenzo” (printer’s device with Rod of Asclepius), in *Aristotelis libros de Generatione, & Corruptione* by John Philoponus (active 6th century), printed 1564 in Venice, Italy. After John Carroll University Grasselli Library website.

Figure 43: *Luther Leads the Faithful from Egyptian Darkness*, Unknown Artist, Broadsheet print, German, 1524. After R.W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (ill. 21), 1994.

Figure 44: *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, Hans Holbein the Younger, Pen and ink over metalpoint on vellum, England, c. 1534, 22.9 cm x 18.3 cm, The Royal Collection. After the Royal Collection Trust website.

Figure 45: Frontispiece of *Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book*, printed by John Day 1569, London, Lambeth Palace Library Collection. After Lambeth Palace Library website.

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Figure 47: Mamacker Silver Book Cover, Hieronymus Mamacker, Antwerp, 1543, 38.5 cm x 29 cm, Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium. After Hugh Tait, “The Girdle-Prayerbook or ‘Tablett’: An Important Class of Renaissance Jewellery at the Court of Henry VIII” (Fig. 14), 1985.

Figure 48: Detail of the Mamacker Silver Book Cover (plaque), Hieronymus Mamacker, Antwerp, 1543, 38.5 cm x 29 cm, Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium. After Hugh Tait, "The Girdle-Prayerbook or 'Tablett': An Important Class of Renaissance Jewellery at the Court of Henry VIII" (Fig. 17), 1985.

Figure 49: Detail of the Mamacker Silver Book Cover (“Moses”), Hieronymus Mamacker, Antwerp, 1543, 38.5 cm x 29 cm, Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium. After Hugh Tait, “The Girdle-Prayerbook or ‘Tablett’: An Important Class of Renaissance Jewellery at the Court of Henry VIII” (Fig. 15), 1985.

Figure 50: *Anne Askew*, Woodcut, English, 1547, in *The lattre examinacyon of Anne Askewe, latelye martyred in Smythfelde, by the wycked synagogue of Antichrist, with the elucydacyon of Johan Bale*. After the University of Cambridge website.

Figure 51: Beret Clasp, “Susanna and the Elders,” Artist Unknown, Gold and enamel, English, 1510–20, 4.9 cm diameter, The State Hermitage Museum. After the Hermitage Museum website.

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